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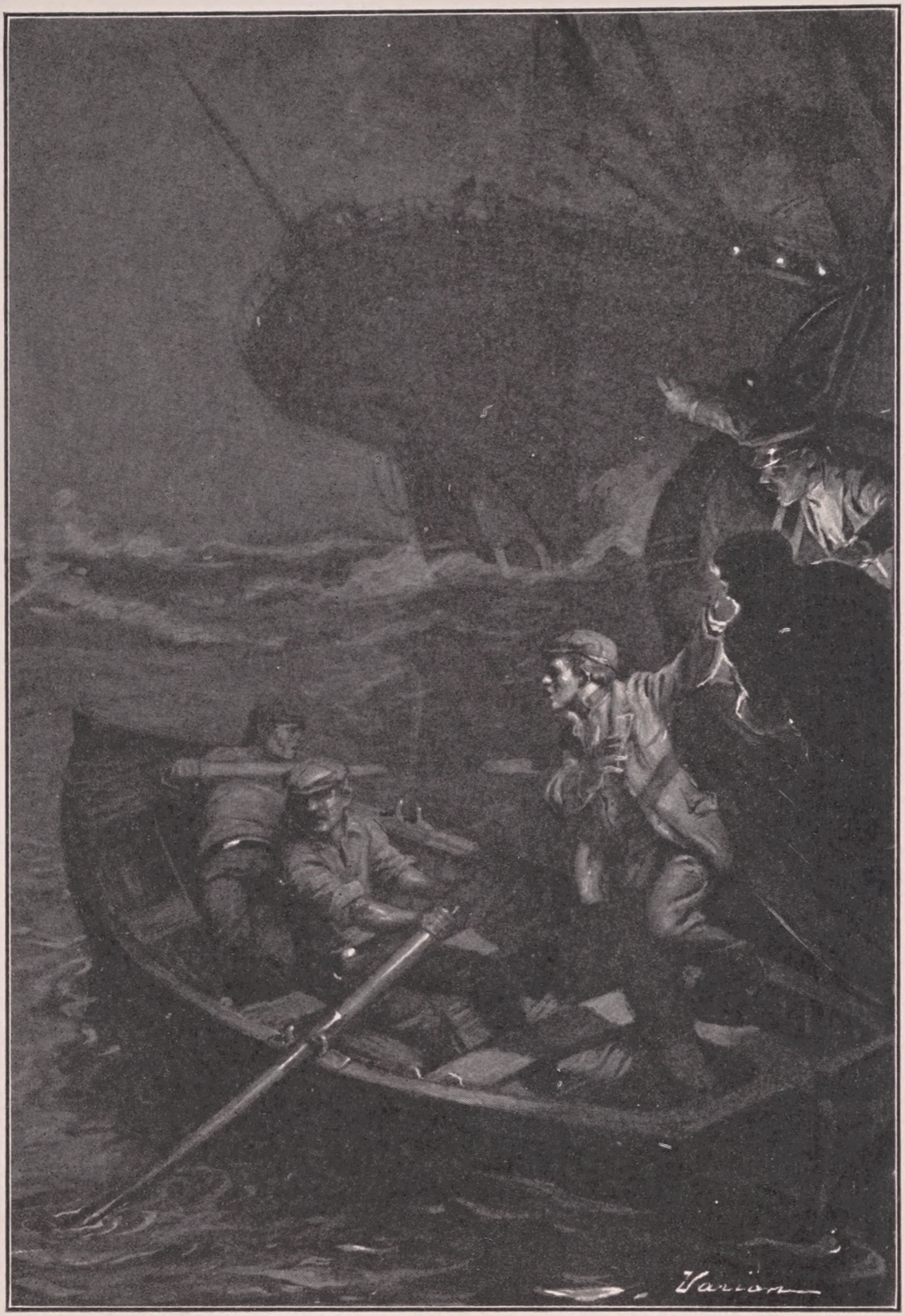

"You're working for Jim Wetherly"

THE WRECKING MASTER

By

RALPH D. PAINE

Author of "A Cadet of the Black Star Line," "The Fugitive Freshman," "The Head Coach," etc.

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CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I.	A Skipper in Bad Company	3
II.	The *Resolute* Fathoms the Plot . . .	21
III.	The Race for the *Kenilworth*	40
IV.	Wicked Mr. Pringle in Collision . .	59
V.	"All Hands Abandon Ship"	75
VI.	Dan Frazier's Predicament	93
VII.	A Fat Engineer to the Rescue . . .	110
VIII.	A Fog of Suspicions	128
IX.	The Broken Hawser	149
X.	Dan's Dreams Come True	168

ILLUSTRATIONS

"You're working for Jim Wetherly" . . . . *Frontispiece*

Facing page

And with Bill McKnight's assistance the derelict was hauled aboard like a large and dripping fish 6

The *Sombrero* sailed like a witch in the race 34

But for once that square-jawed uncle of his had dared too much 84

Dan felt a new thrill of surprise and alarm 104

It was a pretty bit of old-fashioned boarding for the prosaic twentieth century 120

"If you are going to call me a liar at the start, you won't get very far!" 132

She looked as if she had laid her bones on the Reef for good and all 150

THE WRECKING MASTER

THE WRECKING MASTER

CHAPTER I

A SKIPPER IN BAD COMPANY

"A THICK night and no mistake, Dan. It's as black as the face of a Nassau pilot. We ought to be nearing the coal wharf by now. Of course they wouldn't have sense enough to leave a light on it to give us our bearings."

Captain Jim Wetherly was growling through the window of the darkened wheel-house to his deck-hand, young Dan Frazier, as the ocean-going tug *Resolute* felt her way up the harbor of Pensacola. She had towed a dismasted bark into port after a long and stubborn tussle with wind and sea, and her master was in haste to fill the empty bunkers and drive her home to Key West, five hundred miles across the blue Gulf.

The mate and several of the crew had gone ashore for the evening, the fat and grizzled chief

engineer was loafing on the deck below, and Captain Wetherly was somewhat consoled to have a sympathetic listener in his youngest deck-hand. This Dan Frazier was his nephew, not long out of the Key West High School, and trying his hand at seafaring in the *Resolute* as the first chance which had offered to ease his mother's task of caring for him.

In the presence of any of the vessel's company, discipline was observed between the two with a respectful "aye, aye, sir," or "no, sir," on Dan's part, but now when they were alone on deck Dan felt free to reply:

"It's strange water to me, Uncle Jim. I shouldn't wonder if the old *Resolute* felt timid about poking around a crowded harbor on a thick night. What she likes best is plenty of sea-room with a wreck piled hard and fast on the Florida Reef and a fighting chance to pull it off. I wish I could have been on board when you were taking hold of that big Italian steamer last spring. The men say they thought the *Resolute* was going to yank the engines clean out of her before you let go on the last haul that dragged the wreck clear of the Reef. Is it true that Bill

McKnight clamped the safety-valve down and said it was up to Providence to see that his boilers didn't blow up?"

Captain Wetherly chuckled. The flare of a match as he relighted his pipe illumined a pair of steadfast gray eyes and a smooth-shaven chin of such dogged squareness of outline that Dan's statements seemed to be half-way answered even before his uncle said:

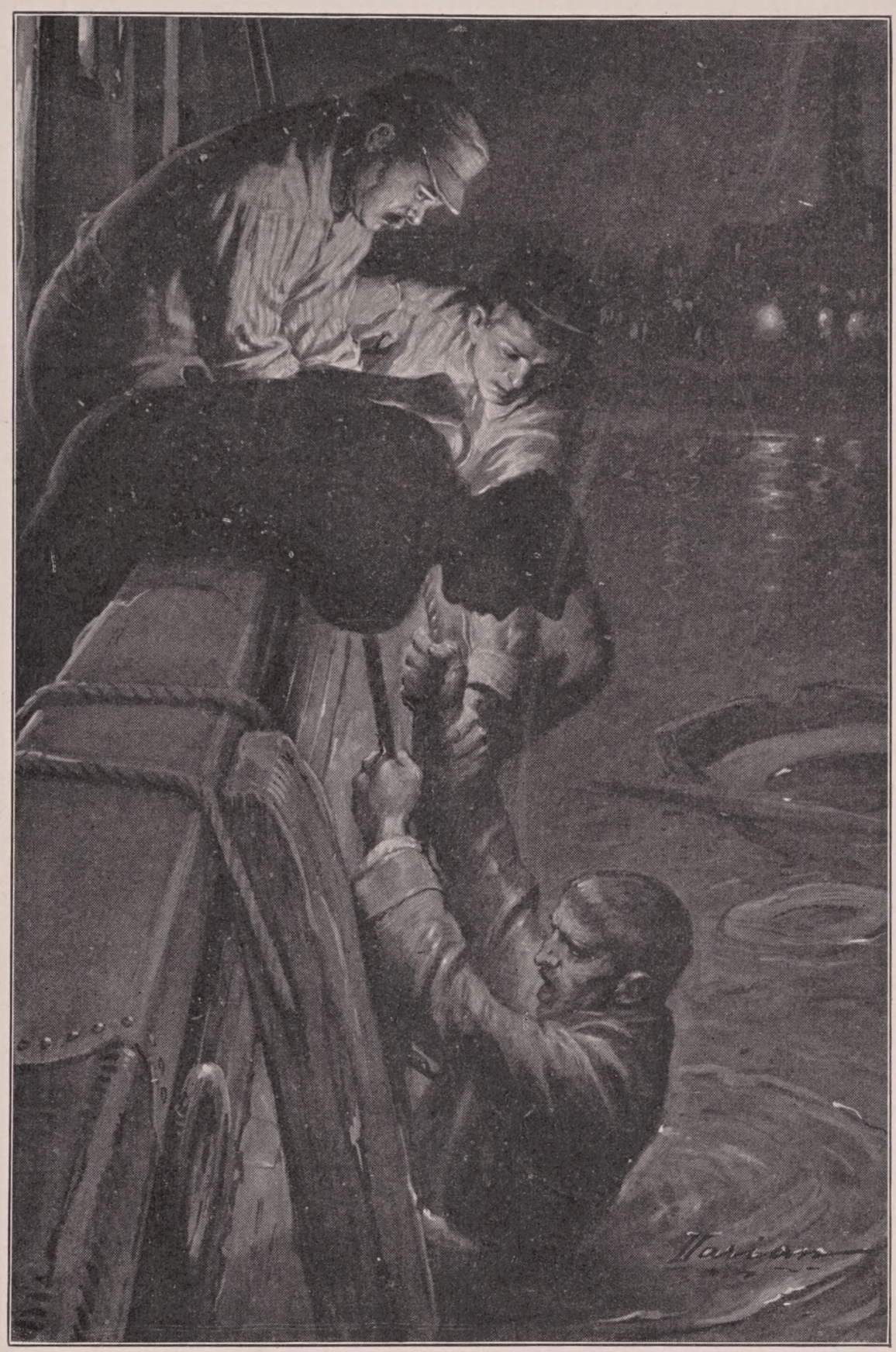
"Pshaw, boy, Bill McKnight is a good chief engineer, but if his engines didn't get any more rest than that tongue of his, they would have been in the scrap-heap long ago. I suppose he has been filling you up with yarns of the wonderful things he has done with this boat on the Reef. Come to think of it, he *was* carrying some steam more than the law allowed when we tackled that Italian wreck for the last time, but we weren't there for our health. And wrecking isn't a business for children, Dan. You'll find that out if you stick by me long enough to get your mate's papers. Seems to me we must have run past that confounded coal wharf by this time. I don't know whether that light yonder is a lantern or a store up the street somewhere."

Dan went over to the side of the deck and peered into the shoreward gloom while Captain Wetherly jerked a bell-pull. A mellow clang floated from the engine-room, the *Resolute* slackened way to half-speed, and began to swing in toward the puzzling light. Dan Frazier thought he heard the click of rowlocks somewhere off in the darkness and cocked an ear to listen. The sound ceased and then he fancied he saw a shadowy patch moving on the water almost in front of the *Resolute's* bow. An instant later Captain Wetherly shouted in alarm:

"Boat ahoy. Do you want to be run under?"

Angry, confused voices were raised from the blackness close ahead while the tug quivered to the thrust of the engines as they strove to check her headway. Panic-stricken profanity was volleyed from the water, there was a slight shock and crash as of splintered planking, and the tug slid over what remained of the blundering small boat.

"Great Scott!" cried Captain Jim. "The poor fools must have done it a-purpose. When they come up and yell, stand by to fish 'em out, Dan. Tell Bill McKnight to man a boat and be ready to lower it. Of all the——"



And with Bill McKnight's assistance the derelict was hauled aboard like a large and dripping fish

The horrified Dan had already scampered down to the main-deck and, snatching up a coil of heaving line, he sprang upon the guard-rail and waited for a call for help from the castaways. The chief engineer was bawling commands to a fireman and the cook who were fumbling with the falls of a boat swung aft. The galley boy came rushing along with a lantern and Dan held it over the side just in time to see a head bob to the foaming surface with a gurgling lament:

"Aren't you going to haul me aboard your murderin' tow-boat?"

Dan tossed him a bight of the line into which he wriggled his shoulders and with Bill McKnight's assistance the derelict was hauled aboard like a large and dripping fish. They did not waste time in looking him over, but asked in the same breath:

"How many more of you?"

"Only one, and he can't be far off," panted the victim of the collision. "You'll hear him holler pretty soon unless you knocked his brains out when you struck us."

The boat was ready by this time, and Dan and the cook, letting it down by the run, scrambled

in and shoved clear of the tug. They had paddled only a little way astern when the lantern threw its wavering gleam athwart the missing man, who was groaning as if hurt, while he tried with feeble splashing to keep himself afloat. With great exertion he was dragged over the gunwale and taken to the *Resolute*. He was unable to stand on deck and blood was oozing from a ragged gash on his forehead. The engineer helped carry him into his own stateroom a few steps away on the lower deck, where the wet clothing was stripped from him and the bunk made ready.

Meanwhile, Captain Wetherly, relieved to learn that no lives were lost, rang up speed and headed the tug for what he hoped might be the wharf he was seeking. Presently Dan Frazier reported at the wheel-house door and explained:

"You won't be any more surprised than I was to find out that the first man we picked up is Jerry Pringle. Yes, it's old Pringle himself sure enough, Uncle Jim. I didn't get time for a sight of him until just now. What in the world is he doing so far from Key West, and how did he

happen to be run down in a boat at night in Pensacola harbor? It beats me."

"What has he got to say for himself?" snapped Captain Jim with a note of hostility and suspicion in his voice. "Is he sober? And Jerry Pringle let a tow-boat waltz right over him! Um-mm, he must have been mighty busy thinking about something else. Who is the other fellow? Ever see him before?"

"No, sir. He's an Englishman, I think, a big, strong man with a brown beard. He is pretty well knocked out and his wits were muddled by a thump on the head. He talks flighty. Jerry Pringle is with him and says he will fetch him around without our help and get him ashore as soon as we land."

"Well, there's the coal-pocket looming up ahead, and you'd better get aft to make a line fast, Dan," observed the captain. "As soon as we dock, I'll step down and see what I can do for our passengers. They're welcome to stay aboard overnight. Jump lively."

While the *Resolute* was deftly laid alongside the head of the wharf, Dan made a flying leap to the string-piece and dragged the hawsers

to the nearest pilings, bow and stern. Then he hurried back to the chief engineer's room in quest of more information about the strange and unwilling visit of Mr. Jeremiah Pringle of Key West.

Dan Frazier knew him as one of the most daring and successful wreckers of the Florida Reef, that cruel, hidden rampart of coral which stretches in the open sea for a hundred and fifty miles along the Atlantic coast of southern Florida, on the edge of the great highway of ocean traffic for Central and South America. Because the Gulf Stream flows north along this crowded highway, the steamers and sailing craft bound south skirt the Reef as close as they dare in order to avoid the adverse current. Tall, spider-legged, steel light-houses rise from the submerged Reef, but its ledges still take their yearly toll of costly vessels, as they have done for centuries. When such disasters happen, the wreckers flock seaward to try to save the ship and cargo.

Jerry Pringle was one of the last of a famous race of native wrecking masters of Key West. His father and grandfather were wreckers before him, and they had been hard and godless

men, rejoicing in the tidings of disaster on the Reef as a chance to plunder and destroy. Rumor had said some curious things about this Jeremiah Pringle's methods as a wrecking master, but Dan Frazier gave them careless heed, partly because he had heard so many wicked tales of the by-gone wrecking days, but more because young Barton Pringle, the only son of this man, was his dearest chum and school-mate.

With very lively curiosity Dan halted in the doorway of the little state-room which Captain Jim Wetherly had entered just before him. Jeremiah Pringle was sitting on the edge of the bunk as if to shield his comrade of the small boat from observation, and was gruffly cautioning him not to exert himself by trying to talk. Captain Wetherly was eying them both with the keenest interest reflected in his determined countenance. He was saying as Dan came within earshot:

"Of course I am very sorry it happened, Pringle, but I don't see how you can hold me responsible for the loss of your boat. My lights were in order and the vessel was moving at half

speed. I'm sure your friend there, the master of the *Kenilworth*, lays it to your own carelessness."

"Who said he was master of the *Kenilworth?*" spoke up Jerry Pringle. "You seem to be taking a whole lot of things for granted. He's in no shape to deny it, so call him what you please."

Mr. Pringle looked unhappy and not all at ease, nor had he any thanks to spare for his rescue. Even Dan could perceive how thoroughly disgusted he was over this unlucky meeting with Captain Wetherly who replied:

"Oh, yes, it *is* Captain Bruce of the *Kenilworth*, that big English cargo steamer in the stream loaded with naval stores for London. He was pointed out to me in the broker's office this afternoon. Were you coming ashore from his ship when you ran under my bows?"

Hearing his name spoken, the man with the bandaged head tried to raise himself in the bunk and muttered, as if his senses were still confused:

"Malcolm Bruce, if you please, bound home to London, then out to Vera Cruz with a general cargo. Lost at sea, all stove up, and a black,

wet night. But I get well paid for losing the rotten old ship. How much is it worth, Pringle? Ha, ha!"

Jerry Pringle's tanned cheek turned a shade or two paler and he forced a hot drink between the other man's lips as if to shut off his speech. The master of the *Kenilworth* subsided and put his hands to his head while Pringle explained to Captain Wetherly with nervous haste:

"He's jabbering about the loss of his boat that you made hash of. It was nothing but a skiff. It was my fault, I guess. We were busy talking and I kept no lookout. I'll pay him the cost of the boat, Captain Wetherly. So forget it, won't you. If you'll send ashore for a hack I can lug Captain Bruce up to a hotel right away."

"No hurry, is there? Let him rest," said Captain Jim. "Dan here will sit up with him if you want to turn in. Of course you know Dan Frazier, your boy's chum."

Mr. Pringle glanced up at the doorway and looked even more downcast and sullen at recognizing Dan. He nodded at the interested lad and returned:

"So many of us sort of crowd this state-room. I'll look after Captain Bruce by myself if you don't mind clearing out, Captain Wetherly."

The dazed captain of the *Kenilworth* showed signs of trying to break into the conversation and managed to sputter excitedly:

"I get ten thousand dollars for this night's job."

At this, Jerry Pringle fairly begged the kind-hearted skipper of the *Resolute* to withdraw, and although the night was cool for September, the rescued wrecking master wiped the perspiration from his face with a wet shirt sleeve. Captain Wetherly gazed down at the man in the bunk for a moment, nodded gravely, and tiptoed on deck with a parting remark:

"Ten thousand dollars is a lot of money to pay for a splintered skiff, Pringle."

"Captain Bruce is ravin' crazy," grumbled Jerry Pringle as he shut the state-room door.

"Go fetch a hack, Dan," ordered Captain Jim, "and help Pringle lug him ashore. I tried to be decent to them, but my patience is frazzled. I don't want 'em aboard any longer than I can help."

"But what are they doing together in Pensacola harbor?" asked Dan. "There's something mighty queer about it all."

"Keep your guesses to yourself, and don't think too hard about it, or you may go off your noddle like the Britisher in yonder," said captain Jim as he went forward toward his own room. Dan wandered far and wide ashore before he found a cruising hack and was able to return to the wharf. Going aboard, he delayed to coil and stow a heaving line which tripped him as he passed along the lower deck. From a near-by window came the voice of Captain Bruce of the *Kenilworth* in low-spoken query, evidently addressed to his companion, Jeremiah Pringle:

"Did I say anything silly? I was a bit muddled, I know. I didn't bring you into it, did I? There was nothing said about the *Kenilworth's* next voyage, was there?"

"You said a heap sight too much," was the reply in a rumbling undertone. "That Jim Wetherly is pretty keen when it comes to putting two and two together. But he has a kind of mushy streak of sentiment in him and he won't

believe anything bad of a man till the evidence is strong enough to hang him. It's been an unlucky night's work, and it's time we were out of here."

Dan knocked on the door and, without even a "thank you," Jerry Pringle brushed him out of the way and half-dragged, half-carried Captain Bruce toward the gang-plank. The master of the *Kenilworth* bade him halt, however, and, grasping Dan by the hand, told him in a deep and pleasant voice:

"You saved my life, youngster, and I won't forget it. Come aboard my ship before sailing and let me thank you, won't you? I'll be fit and hearty in a day or so."

Dan liked the looks and manner of the big, brown-bearded Englishman and warmly replied:

"Pulling you out of the wet was the least we could do. I hope your head will mend all right. Captain Wetherly will be glad to see you on board again, sir."

Dan lent a hand as far as the hack and then sought Captain Wetherly's room. The light was burning and the deck-hand dared to enter on the chance of having a talk with "Uncle

Jim," whom he found reading a novel in his bunk. The boy had many questions to ask, but he was not ready to go straight to the heart of the matter, and so began:

"Jerry Pringle acted kind of ugly and uneasy, didn't you think? I suppose he was mad at getting spilled into the harbor. You and he never did seem to be very fond of each other."

Captain Jim threw down his book and sat up in his bunk with a rather grim smile as he replied:

"You're no fool, Dan, though you aren't more than half as old as me. And you have lived ten of your years in Key West. I know you think the world of young Barton Pringle. He is a fine, clean lad, the son of his mother through and through. But there's a different strain in that dad of his, and you know it. You want to find out what I think of to-night's business, don't you? Well, I think the big Englishman might have picked better company."

"But he said some things about getting ten thousand dollars for losing his ship and so on, Uncle Jim, and I heard more than you did. He was worried to death for fear he had talked

too much. The wrecking business in Key West is square and honest as far as I know, but ship captains *have* put their vessels on the Reef on purpose in the old days and the wreckers helped plan it beforehand. And I can't help wondering if Jerry Pringle came to Pensacola to fix up a deal with this captain of the *Kenilworth* to lose his ship on the next voyage out from London to Vera Cruz. There would be rich salvage and loot in a general cargo, wouldn't there? She's a mighty big steamer."

Captain Jim stroked his chin and was so long silent that Dan began to fidget. Then, as if rousing himself from some very interesting reflections, the elder man drawled in a tone of mild reproof:

"There isn't a bit of evidence that would hold water, Dan. I may have my suspicions, but perhaps they are all wrong, and if we said a word it might ruin a good ship-master with his owners. Jerry Pringle and he must have been up to their ears in conversation when they let us run 'em under, and I wish the big Englishman could prove an alibi for the time we had him, aboard. Better forget it."

Dan bit his lip and appeared so gloomy and forlorn that his uncle was moved to ask what troubled him.

"It's Bart Pringle," said Dan, and his voice was not quite steady. "When I meet him in Key West I'll have a secret to hold back from him, and it's about his own father. Oh, I can't believe there's anything to it. And there's Bart's mother! Well, I think I'll turn in, Uncle Jim. Good-night."

Late in the next afternoon the *Resolute* cast off from the coal wharf and swiftly picked up headway as her powerful engines began to urge her, with tireless, throbbing cadence, toward her distant home port of Key West. Presently she surged past a long, deep-laden cargo steamer from whose stern rippled the flaming British ensign. It was the *Kenilworth*, and Captain Jim and Dan Frazier stared at her with curious interest.

A tall, broad-shouldered, brown-bearded figure was leaning against the railing of her bridge. A strip of bandage gleamed white beneath the visor of his cap. He flourished an arm in farewell to the *Resolute* whose deep-toned whistle returned a salute of three blasts.

Dan passed by the wheel-house door on an errand for the mate and could not help saying aloud to himself:

"It must have been a nightmare. That Captain Bruce looks like too fine a man to think of such a dreadful thing!"

Captain Jim Wetherly overheard the comment and seemed to echo this verdict as he remarked in a reverent and sympathetic tone:

"Lead Captain Malcolm Bruce not into temptation, for Jerry Pringle is a hard customer to have any dealings with, on or off the Reef."

CHAPTER II

THE "RESOLUTE" FATHOMS THE PLOT

As the *Resolute* steamed into Key West harbor, Dan Frazier was on the lookout for his friend Barton Pringle who almost always ran down to the wharf when the whistle of Captain Wetherly's tug bellowed the tidings of her return from sea. This time, however, Dan felt that a shadow had fallen over their close comradeship which had been wholly frank and confiding through all their years together. Dan could not forget the events of the night in which Barton's father had behaved like a man caught in the act of planning something dark and evil.

But the sight of Barton Pringle waiting on the end of the wharf to catch the *Resolute's* heaving lines and welcome him home, made Dan wonder afresh if he had not been too hasty and suspicious. Barton's honest, beaming face was in itself a voucher for his bringing up amid

sweet and wholesome influences. Nor was Dan ready to believe that a bad father could have such a straight and manly son. Before the boys were within shouting range of each other, Captain Wetherly sent for Dan and told him:

"You can stay home until you get further orders. I don't expect to leave port again for several days. Tell your mother that I will run in for a little while after supper to-night."

Dan thanked him with a grin of delight and ran below to yell to Barton Pringle on the wharf:

"Hello, Bart. Come aboard and help me scrub decks and get things ship-shape and I'll be ready to jump ashore just so much sooner."

Barton made a flying leap aboard as soon as the lines were made fast, and asked as he picked up a pail and broom:

"What kind of a voyage did you have, Dan? Anything exciting happen?"

"Nothing to speak of," replied Dan, and he felt his face redden with a guilty sense of secrecy. He was about to say that he had met Barton's father in Pensacola, without mentioning how or where, when the other lad spoke up:

"I tried to get away for a little trip myself. Father went up the Gulf on the mail steamer and I begged him to take me along. But he was going only to Tampa to see about buying a couple of sponging schooners, and he said he was in too much of a hurry to bother with me."

"Going only to Tampa," echoed Dan with a foolish smile. "Oh, yes, only as far as Tampa. Sorry you had to miss it, Bart. How's everything with you? Have you bent the new main-sail on the *Sombrero?*"

Barton plunged into an excited discussion about the fast little sloop which the boys owned in partnership, while Dan tried to keep his wits about him, for he was thrown into fresh doubt and uneasiness by the news that Jeremiah Pringle had said he was going to Tampa instead of Pensacola. Usually the two boys had so many important matters to talk about that one could find a chance to break in only when the other paused for lack of breath, but now Dan found it hard to avoid awkward silences on his part. He was glad when old Bill McKnight, the chief engineer of the *Resolute*, waddled up

to them and announced with a sweeping gesture toward the city streets:

"Back again to the palm trees and the brave Cubanos and the excitements of a metropolis smeared over a chunk of coral reef so blamed small that I'm scared to be out after dark without a lantern for fear I'll walk overboard. I'm due to start a revolution in Honduras, and to-day I enlist a few hundred brave and desperate Key West cigar-makers, Dan. I'm perishin' for a little war and tumult. Look out for my signal rockets."

With that Mr. McKnight jauntily twirled his grizzled moustache and ambled up the wharf. He had been engineer of the *Resolute* when she was running the Spanish blockade of Cuba, as a filibuster to carry arms and ammunitions to the revolutionists, and his cool-headed courage had fetched the tug out of some perilous places. The ponderous, good-natured engineer was very fond of Dan and every little while invited him, with all seriousness, to join some new and absurd scheme for touching off a Spanish-American revolution, with dazzling promises of loot and glory.

The boys laughed as they gazed after him, and Barton said:

"Filibustering must keep your hair standing on end, eh, Dan? I reckon it beats wrecking, though you couldn't get an old Key Wester to admit it. There hasn't been a wreck on the Reef for goodness knows how long. Father promised to take me with him on the next wrecking job if it isn't blowing too hard when the schooners go out to the Reef."

"Well, you can count on seeing Captain Jim Wetherly and the *Resolute* on the job no matter how hard she blows," smiled Dan with a spark of the rivalry which flamed high between the tow-boat and the schooner fleet. Willing hands made short work of Dan's tasks, and he hurried into his shore-going clothes while Barton swung his legs from the bunk and retailed the latest news about ships, and the sponge market, and the High School base-ball team which had won a match from the soldiers of the garrison. They parted a little later, Dan eager to run home and see his mother, and Barton anxious to make the *Sombrero* ready for a trial spin.

As Dan sped toward the cottage on the other

side of the narrow island, he said to himself with a puzzled frown:

"Everything Bart talked about made me think of the other night in Pensacola: his father's going away, and the next wreck on the Reef, and all that. And he thinks his father is the strongest, bravest man that ever went to sea. Maybe he is, but I wish he wasn't related to Bart."

A slender, sweet-faced woman in black was waiting in a dooryard shaded by tropical verdure as Dan rounded the corner. She had heard the far-echoing, resonant whistle of the *Resolute*, and knew that her boy was home again. Her husband, for many years employed in the Key West Custom House, had died only two years before, and the love and yearning in her eyes at sight of Dan would have told you that he was her only child and her all-in-all if you had never seen them together before. He was taller than she, and, as her sturdy son stooped to kiss her with his arms about her neck, she said:

"I wanted to be at the wharf to meet you, Danny boy, but I couldn't leave home in time. Bart Pringle's mother ran in to talk to me about

sending him away to school. I told her I wanted to do as much for you, but the way wasn't open yet. They can afford it, and Bart is too bright and ambitious to settle down in a Key West rut."

They walked to the wide veranda across which the cool trade-wind swept, and Mrs. Frazier ordered Dan to take the biggest, easiest wicker chair, after which she vanished indoors and almost instantly reappeared with a plate laden with pie and doughnuts.

"You had breakfast in that stuffy little galley, I suppose," laughed she, "but I know you are always hungry. You can stow these trifles away as a deck-load, can't you?"

Dan confessed that he could carry any amount of cargo of this kind and then, between bites of a home-made doughnut, spoke very earnestly:

"Bart ought to go North to school, mother, and I will tell him so and back you up for all I'm worth. It will do him good to break away from home. And Uncle Jim Wetherly will put up the same line of argument to Mrs. Pringle whenever you say the word."

"Jim is my dearest brother, but I can't picture

him as showing very much excitement about Bart's education," she responded. "He thinks there's no finer thing in the world than to be master and owner of a sea-going tow-boat. Why do you think he will be interested, Dan?"

Her son took her hand in his hard, sun-burned paw and with a stammering effort began his confession of all that he had heard and seen after Jerry Pringle and the English ship-master had been run down in their small boat. The mother listened with wide-eyed astonishment, and then with something like indignation she cried:

"Why, Dan, you ought to be writing novels for a living! That poor Captain Bruce of the *Kenilworth* was out of his head, and you know that Jerry Pringle has a sour, gruff way with him even when he's on dry land. I can't believe it of Mary Pringle's husband. It is a dreadful thing to suspect him of, plotting to wreck a fine, big steamer."

"That's just like a woman," declared Dan with a very grown-up air of wisdom. "Mrs. Pringle hasn't anything to do with it. And you are like Uncle Jim, always refusing to think

other folks are a bit less square and decent than you are. Ask him to-night what *he* thinks about it, but don't breathe a word to anybody else, will you?"

"I shall scold him for putting such silly ideas in your head," firmly announced Mrs. Frazier. "You couldn't have pieced this plot together all by yourself, even if you are as big and strong as a young tow-boat."

"All right," said Dan good-humoredly. "Only I hope Barton will go away to school before the explosion happens. For if I'm right, Jerry Pringle may be in disgrace before he's a year older. Captain Jim will never let up on him if the *Kenilworth* does happen to be stranded on the Reef."

When Captain Wetherly strolled in after supper, his sister began at once to cross-question him. He evaded her as far as possible and finally declared:

"I knew that Dan would tell you. I don't want him to keep anything from his mother. But it must go no farther than this. I will say this much, that when the *Kenilworth* is due in the Florida Straits on her next voyage out-

ward bound, the *Resolute* will be a good deal less than a thousand miles away. And just for curiosity I have cabled to London to find out if she is really chartered to Vera Cruz for her next voyage, and what kind of a reputation her owners bear. They may be interested in losing her, do you see?

"Speaking of cables, Dan," he continued; "I got orders this afternoon to go to Charleston at once and tow that big suction dredge to Santiago. We shall be able to get away in a couple of days. You had better come aboard to-morrow night."

"Why, you'll be gone for weeks and weeks, Dan," sorrowfully cried his mother.

"I won't waste any time, nor try to save coal on this voyage," said Captain Jim with a grim smile. "I want to be a good deal nearer the Reef than Santiago, about two months from now."

"It's a long, long while to have my boy away from me," Mrs. Frazier murmured with a sigh. "But this tremendous conspiracy will be all blown out of your heads before you come home again."

After a luxurious night's slumber in a real bed, Dan felt as if the cobwebs had been brushed from his busy brain and that the bright world held better employment than brooding over what might happen to somebody else. He set forth to find Barton and arrange a match race between the *Sombrero* and a rival craft, to be sailed before Dan had to go to sea. The challenge being accepted on the spot, there was much to be done in a very few hours, and Dan heartily agreed with Barton's opinion delivered from the cockpit of their rakish craft:

"It is a pity we have anything to do but sail boats for the fun of it. What a bully sou'west breeze we're going to have this afternoon, Dan! Can you coax old Bill McKnight to come along for ballast?"

"Yes, if we promise him to smuggle some rifles and dynamite in the hold," laughed the other.

After dinner, Dan sauntered along the water front in the hope of finding the mighty bulk of the chief engineer to serve as two hundred and seventy pounds of desirable live ballast. The south-bound mail steamer, from Tampa for

Havana, had just landed her passengers, and foremost among them loomed the tail and lanky figure of Jeremiah Pringle. The wrecking master spied Dan and hurried to meet him in the narrow street. His manner was no longer hostile and sullen, and Dan was amazed to have a greeting hand stretched toward him and to hear a cordial voice:

"How's the boy? You and Bart as busy as ever? I went up the Gulf to buy a schooner or two, and I found a beauty. I need a mate for her, Dan. You are young, but you know more about salt water than most men. It means double the wages of a deck-hand on that sooty old tow-boat. I want you to go to Tampa and help fetch her down right away, which is why I spring the proposition on you kind of off-hand and sudden."

It was a chance at which Dan would have jumped a week before. Something held him back, however, and, although he did not take time to reason it out, he vaguely felt that Jeremiah Pringle was trying to bribe him to keep his mouth shut. But he had a natural fear of making an enemy of such a man as this, and he

swiftly decided to make no mention of the night in Pensacola. That was a matter for Captain Jim Wetherly to handle. Dan was ready to stand by his guns, however, so far as his own honesty was concerned, and he stoutly replied:

"That is a big thing to have come my way, Captain Pringle, and I ought to thank you. But I don't care to take it. My mother wants me to stick by Captain Jim Wetherly if I'm going to stay afloat, and she knows best."

Jerry Pringle looked black, but forced a smile as he growled:

"One thing you've got from your Uncle Jim is a swelled head. Well, we'll say no more about it; *nothing at all about it, understand?*"

The last words were spoken with a threatening earnestness, and Dan understood what was meant. He nodded and went on his way, for once anxious to get to sea, away from a situation in which he seemed to become more and more befogged. He found Bart dancing jig-steps with impatience, and trying to listen to a long-winded yarn delivered by Mr. Bill McKnight who had been already kidnapped for the afternoon.

The *Sombrero* sailed like a witch in the race, the live ballast shifted himself with more agility than the boys had dreamed he could display, and the match was won with the lee-rail under and the cockpit awash. Mrs. Frazier watched the finish from a wharf and invited Bart and the engineer to come home with Dan for a festive supper party in celebration. There could be no long faces or heavy thoughts at such a time, and Dan forgot the shadow and laughed himself into a state of collapse along with his mother and Bart when Mr. McKnight, with a wreath of scarlet ponciana blossoms on his bald head, danced Spanish fandangos until the cottage shook from floor to rafters.

They all escorted Dan down to the *Resolute* in the starlit evening and sat on the guard-rail while the chief engineer fished a guitar from under his bunk and sang Cuban serenades, leading off with "La Paloma." It was as merry as such a parting hour could be, but there were tears in the mother's eyes when she kissed Dan good-night, and her voice was not steady when she whispered, "God bless and keep you, my precious boy."

The *Sombrero* sailed like a witch in the race

When it came to saying good-by to Bart, Dan was more serious than usual and, he held fast to his comrade's hand for a moment while he looked him in the eyes and said:

"Blow high, blow low, you will find me standing by, Bart. Good luck and lots of it."

Shortly after daylight next morning the *Resolute* churned her way out of the placid harbor and laid her coastwise course for Charleston. It proved to be an uneventful run with pleasant weather and a favoring sea. Captain Wetherly had nothing to say about the steamer *Kenilworth* until they reached Charleston where he found a cablegram from London waiting for him. He read it aloud to Dan as soon as they happened to be alone.

"*Unable to send required information until later. Will communicate your next port.*"

"It might have cleared up this *Kenilworth* business," said Captain Jim. "However, we may get a message at Santiago."

But the *Resolute* was not to see Santiago as soon as her master expected. There was a week's delay in getting the great suction dredge ready to begin the voyage. Then, when the

Resolute had taken hold of the clumsy monster, for all the world like a bull-dog trying to drag a dry-goods box, the captain of the dredge was hurt by a falling bolt and there was more delay at anchor while a new skipper could be sent for.

When, at last, the unwieldy tow was got to sea, strong head-winds buffeted her day after day and urged the panting, sea-swept *Resolute* to her best efforts to keep up steerage way. She crept southward like a snail, eating up coal at a rate which compelled Captain Wetherly to put into Nassau, and again into the harbor of Mole St. Nicolas at the western end of Hayti.

Twice the dredge snapped her hawsers and broke clean adrift. When the weary tug and her tow crept in sight of the Morro Castle at the mouth of Santiago harbor, Bill McKnight almost wept as he surveyed his engines and boilers. Sorely racked and strained they were, and Captain Jim tried to comfort him by declaring that no other fat engineer could have patched and held them together to the end of the voyage. Making temporary repairs was a costly and tedious undertaking, and the crew

of the *Resolute* tired of the charms of Santiago and grew restless and homesick for Key West.

While Dan, the captain, and McKnight were eating lunch ashore one day, a swarthy, dapper clerk from the cable office sought the Venus Café with a message which he had tried to deliver on board the tug. It was for Captain Wetherly who read it with an air of mingled surprise and chagrin. With a glance at the engineer who was blissfully absorbed over his third plate of alligator pear salad, Captain Jim remarked as he handed the sheet to Dan:

"It is from London. Well, the cat is out of the bag, and we might as well let McKnight in. We are going to need him before we get through with this job, and need him bad. I suppose I ought to have been more suspicious, but it sounded too rotten to be true. Bill, you must have that engine room in shape this week if it breaks your back. We are going to make a record run home to Key West."

Dan read in silence before handing the cablegram to Captain Wetherly.

"*Kenilworth cleared for Vera Cruz. Heavily*

insured. General cargo. Owners hard hit by recent losses. Will bear watching."

Captain Jim hammered the table with his fist and tried to speak in an undertone as he hotly exclaimed:

"This confidential report makes my suspicions fit together like the pieces of a puzzle. I couldn't for the life of me understand how the master of a big steamer could afford to ram her ashore and lose her, and his berth and his reputation with it, for ten thousand dollars. But if he knew that his owners would shield him and stand in with him, why, of course, he might be tempted to clean up ten thousand dollars for himself when a man like Jerry Pringle crossed his bows and passed him a few hints. A lot of good it would have done for me to cable Captain Bruce's owners and give them warning of what we heard that night in Pensacola harbor. They would have laughed at me as a meddlesome idiot. Cleared for Vera Cruz, has she? She does her ten knots right along, I picked up that bit of information at Pensacola. Allow her twenty days to the Reef."

Bill McKnight had dropped his fork and was

purple with suppressed excitement. When the captain fetched up for lack of breath, he blurted in a hoarse whisper:

"It doesn't take a axe to drive an idea into my noddle. As near as I can make out, though your bearings are considerably overheated, Captain, there is scheduled to be a large and expensive wreck on the Reef, assisted by her skipper and one Jeremiah Pringle. It sounds like the good old times before the light-houses crippled the wrecking industry. And we *Resolutes* propose to be first on hand to pull her off and disappoint certain enterprising persons?"

"Disappoint 'em!" fairly shouted Captain Jim. "If the *Kenilworth* does go ashore, I'll fetch that vessel off the Reef if it tears the *Resolute* to kindling wood. I'll break their rotten hearts and show them what honest wrecking is."

"I didn't throw away that clamp I made to hold the safety-valve down, Captain," chuckled Bill McKnight. "And I ain't afraid to use it again, either."

CHAPTER III

THE RACE FOR THE "KENILWORTH"

CHIEF ENGINEER BILL MCKNIGHT hoisted himself up the iron ladder that led from the fire-room of the *Resolute* and tottered on deck gasping for breath. He was begrimed from head to foot, the sweat had furrowed little streaks in the mask of soot and grease which covered his ample countenance, and his eyes were red with weariness and want of sleep. He had shoved the tug back to Key West at her top speed, and now he was toiling night and day to make her ready for whatever summons might come for a tussle on the Reef. Captain Wetherly found him slumped against the deck-house with his head in his hands and exhorted him cheerily:

"Don't give up the ship, Bill. It is a great repair job that you've done, and the worst is over. The new tubes are most all in, aren't they?"

"The boilers will be as good as new," grunted McKnight, "but how about my bronchial tubes, Captain? I can't plug them up and make steam same as I plugged the boilers and fetched you back from Santiago. I'm so full of cinders inside that I rattle when I walk. But give me another week and the boat will be fit to hitch a hawser to this benighted island of Key West and tow it out to sea. Anything new ashore?"

Captain Jim sat down beside the engineer and made sure that they could not be overheard as he began:

"Dan has been watching Jerry Pringle's fleet of wrecking vessels for me. Those two schooners he bought in the Gulf have come into port, and it is mighty little sponging he intends to do with them at present, Bill. They look fast and they can stow lots of cargo. And Pringle has been overhauling his other schooners and has chartered three more in Key West. He says he intends to send them out to join the mackerel fleet."

"Anything doing in the tow-boat line?" asked McKnight with a new gleam of interest in his damaged eyes. "If Pringle aims to

tackle a certain job that may be reported from the Reef pretty soon, he will have to make a bluff at pulling the steamer off, won't he? There might be a small fortune in salvage, besides looting the cargo out of her."

"He is dickering for some kind of a time charter on the *Henry Foster*," snapped Captain Jim. "She couldn't pull a feather-bed off the Reef without breaking down. And I understand he has been cabling up the Gulf about another tug or two."

"Well, we can get all the tow-boats we need and good ones, can't we?" beamed McKnight. "Maybe we can't handle most any kind of a wrecking job ourselves! And there won't be any bluffs about it when *we* take hold."

"I'm certainly sorry for Dan, poor boy," said Captain Jim with a sigh. "He feels as if he were spying on Bart's father. And to make it worse, Bart is going to sail with the old man for a while and the lad will be mixed up in this nasty mess as sure as fate, and he will be on the wrong side of it. Here comes our Dan now. Drop the subject, Bill. It only makes the youngster more unhappy."

Dan Frazier had passed some restless nights since his return to Key West, but his mind was too sunny and youthful to believe that things were ever as bad as they might be. He found comfort in the hope that Captain Wetherly would spoil the plot to lose the *Kenilworth*. He had implicit confidence in his uncle's ability to win against any odds with the stanch *Resolute*, and now that a fair and open battle against Jerry Pringle was assured, Dan found himself eager for the fray. Barton had told him that morning:

"Father and mother are talking of sending me North to school, but I'm going to rough it at sea with father for a month or so. He said he tried to get you to work for him. I knew you wouldn't leave Captain Jim, but maybe we might have been lucky enough to work on a wreck together."

"You can't tell, Bart. Perhaps we shall, but we may be working against each other. I'll back Captain Jim Wetherly to be first man aboard the next vessel that goes on the Reef."

"Captain Jim is a good man," declared Bart,

"but it will be a cold day when he lays alongside a wreck ahead of that daddy of mine."

The boys were busy with their unbeaten sloop *Sombrero*, and one day slid into another while Dan employed much of his spare time in helping his mother about the house and in painting the chicken-house, the fences, and porch with great pride in the spick-and-span results. Mrs. Frazier still professed to take no stock in the plot hatched by "Barton's father and Mary Pringle's husband," but she was nervous and absent-minded at times, and there was even more affection than usual in her manner toward Bart.

Dan tacked a calendar at the head of his bed and crossed off the days one by one, saying to himself when he awoke and looked at it:

"Twenty days out from London, as Uncle Jim figured it, and the *Kenilworth* is one day nearer the Reef."

Twenty-two days had been counted when Captain Jim called at the cottage and told Dan to go aboard the *Resolute* and stay there until further orders. When the deck-hand reported for duty, he found all hands of the crew either

at work on board or within call on the wharf. Bill McKnight had steam in his boilers and, although the fires were banked, he had just finished stowing below a generous supply of resinous pine wood, oil-soaked cotton waste, and a barrel of turpentine for use as emergency fuel.

"I lost thirty-five pounds of weight in three weeks," snorted the engineer, "but I mended the old hooker to stay mended. Ho, ho, there goes the *Henry Foster* to sea, Captain. Wonder if there's anything doing so soon? Her engines sound like a mowing-machine trying to cut a path through a brick-yard."

"Don't worry about her," muttered Captain Jim. "Pringle isn't aboard her. We won't leave here until he gets uneasy. He is a good deal better posted than I am about his infernal program and we——"

Captain Jim stopped short, for Barton Pringle unexpectedly appeared on deck and announced to Dan:

"I'm going up the Hawk Channel with father at daylight to look for one of our sponging vessels that's reported ashore near Bahia Honda Key. Thought I'd say good-by."

Dan could not help glancing at Captain Jim as he replied with a quiver of excitement in his voice:

"We may be running up the outside channel before you get back, Bart. Perhaps we shall sight you. Hope you have a good trip."

Barton was in a hurry and jumped ashore with a wave of his hand to the chief engineer. When he was out of ear-shot Dan observed with a long face:

"I would give six months' wages if I could make Bart stay home. Do you suppose his father is really going to sea at daylight, or is he just using Bart to fool us?"

"I haven't been walking in my sleep," dryly responded Captain Jim. "There's a hundred and fifty miles of the Reef between here and Miami and I don't intend to follow any decoy ducks and fetch up at the wrong end of it. I figure on getting a report of any disaster as soon as the next man."

The next day passed without tidings. Jeremiah Pringle had vanished from his haunts in Key West, and four of his schooners were not to be found at their moorings. Another day

dragged by, Bill McKnight was stewing with impatience and Dan Frazier was losing his appetite while Captain Jim Wetherly remained cheerful and unruffled.

He was like another man, however, when a message came to him at noon on the fourth day of waiting. It was from the cable office and he had no more than glanced at it before he darted on deck, ordered the mate to get the crew aboard, shouted down a speaking-tube to Bill McKnight, and took his station at the wheel. His keen-witted, masterful energy seemed to thrill the *Resolute* with life and action. Black smoke gushed from her funnel as her stokers toiled in front of the furnace doors. The engines were turning over when the last deck-hand leaped aboard, and as the dripping hawsers were hauled in, the tug was moving out into the stream.

Key West island was over her stern before Dan found time to run up to the wheel-house. Captain Jim slipped a crumpled bit of paper into his fist and motioned for him to keep it to himself. It was from the marine observer at Jupiter Inlet, a hundred miles to the northward of the Florida Reef:

"*Steamer Kenilworth southbound passed seven this morning. Signalled steering gear disabled by heavy weather but able to proceed.*"

Dan's faith in human nature, as it had to do with the master of the *Kenilworth*, had been so severely shocked that he wondered whether the report of her mishap could be true. He was not shrewd enough to perceive, however, what Captain Jim whispered as he went below to see how things were moving in the engine-room.

"Crippled steering gear, bosh. Her skipper has to fake up some excuse for striking the Reef."

Dan could scarcely believe that the curtain had really risen on this seafaring melodrama in which he was to be an actor. A stately ship was moving blindly toward an ambush which might be the death of her. And racing to find and befriend her was this lone tug whose throbbing heart of steel shook her stout hull from bow to stern as she tore through the long head-seas on the edge of the Gulf Stream. The afternoon was already waning and night would overtake the *Resolute* before she could reach the upper stretches of the Reef. Captain Wetherly

felt certain that the *Kenilworth* would not be rammed on the coral ledges in broad daylight, and he foresaw a desperate game of hide-and-seek between darkness and dawn. But he held to the doctrine that with anything like even chances an honest man will win against a rascal in the game of life, afloat or ashore.

The north-east wind was steadily freshening and the sky had become gray with drifting clouds. As dusk crept over the uneasy sea a mist-like rain began to drizzle. The master of the *Kenilworth* might reasonably lose his bearings if the night grew much thicker. Bill McKnight emerged from his sultry cavern long enough to grumble to Dan:

"What's to hinder our running past that steamer before morning, I want to know, hey, boy?"

"You wouldn't worry if you could watch Captain Jim hug the Reef," assured Dan. "It's like walking a tight-rope. I thought we were going to climb right up into the American Shoal light-house."

"Well, this old tug is doing her fifteen knots, Dan, which is faster than she ever flew before,"

chuckled the chief engineer, "and if we touch bottom, you'll know it all right. Look up yonder at my fireworks."

Dan stared at a banner of solid flame that streamed from the funnel which glowed red hot for a dozen feet above the deck. With a cry of alarm he ran to the upper deck-houses which were built just fore and aft of the funnel and found the wood-work charred and smoking. He shouted down to McKnight who replied with a laugh:

"It isn't my affair if your superstructure burns up. My orders are to make steam. Better mention it to the skipper."

Dan rushed to the wheel-house but Captain Jim received the news as if it were the merest trifle. He was sweeping the sea with his night-glasses and exhorting the mate at the wheel to "hold her as she is and keep your nerve." To Dan he replied airily:

"Caught afire, has she? Good for Bill McKnight. He's delivering the goods. Get some men with buckets and put the fire out. I've no steam to waste in starting the pumps and putting the hose on it."

The deck force was taking turns at shovelling coal to reinforce the stifled stokers, and those off watch followed Dan with cheers. They knew that a race was on, and it lightened their toil to know that the *Resolute* was pounding toward her goal, wherever it was, with every ounce of power in her. Captain Jim joined the fire-fighters long enough to yell to them:

"Look out for rockets ahead. The first man to sight distress signals from the Reef gets ten dollars and a new hat."

A brawny negro stoker wiped the sweat from his eyes as he bobbed on deck and panted:

"When Cap'n Jim smell a wreck she's sure gwine be where he say. If he wants to find 'stress signals he better look amongst us poor niggers in the fire-room."

Midnight came and no one thought of sleep. The excitement had spread even to the cook and the galley boy who thought they saw rockets every time a match was lit up in the bows. Dan gazed out into the starless night and listened to the clamor of the parting seas alongside with frequent thoughts of Barton Pringle who was somewhere out here, proud of his father's sea-

manship and daring, loyal to his interests, trusting him as Dan trusted his Uncle Jim. Now like pawns on a chess board, the two boys were to play their parts on the opposing sides of a conflict which would be fought to the bitter end. Dan was aroused by a hoarse shout from the bridge of the *Resolute:*

"Red rocket two points off the port bow."

Dan wheeled and looked forward while his breath seemed to choke him. A second rocket soared skyward, like a crimson thread hung against the curtain of night.

"Hold her steady as she is," shouted Captain Jim from his post on the bridge. "The weather has cleared a bit and that signal was a long way off."

There was an exultant ring to his strong voice as if he were glad to have the climax in sight. He sent for Dan and told him to stay on the bridge and look for answering signals.

"It's the *Kenilworth*, a thousand to one," said the captain of the *Resolute*. "And if Jerry Pringle's schemes haven't missed fire, his tug or one of his schooners will just happen to be within signalling distance. Ah, by Judas, there

goes his answer, a rocket way out to seaward. Pringle was afraid to hug the Reef on a thick night. He missed the *Kenilworth* when she passed inside of him. It may possibly be a merchantman that has seen the *Kenilworth's* signals, but we take no chances."

Captain Wetherly shouted the tidings down the tube to the engine-room force, and the hard-driven tug tore her way through the heavy seas in the last gallant burst of the home-stretch. Back through the speaking-tube bellowed the voice of the chief engineer:

"I've just put the clamp on the safety-valve, Captain. She's carrying thirty pounds more steam than the law allows, and if she cracks she'll crack wide open. Hooray! Give it to her!"

As if the captain of the stranded steamer were content to know that his message had been seen and answered, he sent up no more rockets, nor did any more answering signals gleam out to seaward. It was a race in the dark. The *Resolute* and her rival, if such it was, must run down two sides of a triangle whose apex was the unseen vessel on the Reef. Captain Jim had

taken the compass bearings of the *Kenilworth's* rockets and, regardless of the risk he ran in driving his steamer along the very fangs of the Reef, he held her in a straight line for her goal and prayed that her bottom would not be ripped off or her straining boilers blow her sky high.

Almost at the same instant that the excited deck force of the *Resolute* glimpsed a red light winking far off to starboard, they saw the mast-head light of the stranded vessel almost dead ahead.

"That red light out yonder belongs to J. Pringle," muttered Captain Wetherly, "And we must be pretty near the same distance from that mast-head light on the Reef. It's going to be a whirlwind finish, all right."

The *Resolute* kept full speed ahead as if she intended to cut her way through the stranded steamer. Not until a huge black shape dotted with a row of cabin lights loomed a little to one side of her headlong flight, did Captain Jim shift his course to round to in the deep water beyond the Reef. His fists were clenched and his jaw was set hard as he glared from the wheel-house door to find the oncoming boat which he

had sworn to beat. Her lights were no more than a quarter of a mile away as the *Resolute* crept under the quarter of the stranded cargo steamer.

"If that's you out yonder, Jerry Pringle," growled Captain Jim to himself, "you've slowed up to find out who the dickens we are. No wonder you're worried. Come on and have it out, you hatchet-faced pirate."

He seized the whistle cord and the *Resolute* roared a long, sonorous blast of greeting and defiance. Then he caught up a megaphone and shouted toward the steamer stranded on the Reef:

"Ship ahoy! I'll stand by to put a line aboard at daylight. Are you resting easy as you are?"

"What steamer is that?" came the answering hail from the darkness.

"The tow-boat *Resolute* of Key West, first vessel to come to your assistance. Who are you?"

"The deuce you are," and there was the most profound amazement in the other voice. "This is the steamer *Kenilworth* of London. A cross-current set me on here but I can work off with my own engines, thank you."

"You'll never work her off," yelled Captain Jim. "Your vessel will break her back if it blows much harder. It's high-water two hours after daylight. It's now or never to pull her clear."

There was no reply. It was evident that Captain Malcolm Bruce was shocked and bewildered by the unlooked for presence of the *Resolute* and was sparring for time until he could hail the other craft which by this time was feeling her way nearer.

Captain Wetherly was in no temper for parleying. He moved the *Resolute* up abreast of the *Kenilworth's* bridge and shouted sternly:

"I know your voice, Captain Bruce. My name is Jim Wetherly. This is the only towboat within five hundred miles that's got the power to drag you clear. And I must take hold on this next tide, before you begin to pound and settle. We'll arrange terms afterward."

"I'll wait till daylight before taking any lines aboard," was the curt response from Captain Bruce who had moved aft to hail the other tug which had now dropped astern of the *Resolute.*

"This is the *Henry Foster*, in command of

Jeremiah Pringle," came back to him. "We answered your rockets. Shall we stand by?"

"I will let you know when daylight comes," answered the master of the *Kenilworth.*

Captain Jim Wetherly stamped his foot and snarled at his puzzled mate:

"They must think I'm seven kinds of a fool. I'll block their game right now. Oh, Dan Frazier, come here, on the jump."

He grasped Dan by the collar, dragged him into the chart-room, and closed the door. With swift, emphatic utterance Captain Wetherly shot these instructions into the boy's ear:

"Dan, I'm going to put you aboard the *Kenilworth.* I can't spare anybody else, and you will be my agent, understand? If Captain Bruce refuses to take my line, this business will be put up to the underwriters from start to finish. And the crooked owners won't be able to collect one dollar of insurance, I'll see to that. And I'll have you as a witness to prove that the *Resolute* was first on the spot. Come along with me."

Captain Jim pulled Dan by the arm toward the lower deck. A boat was lowered in a twin-

kling and, while the excited lad waited for a chance to jump, Captain Jim told him:

"It's likely that Pringle has Barton with him on the tug, and they may try the same trick. If they come aboard the *Kenilworth*, you remember that you're working for Jim Wetherly, no matter if it means a scrap."

As the yawl danced away from the side of the *Resolute*, Captain Jim shouted to the *Kenilworth:*

"Put a ladder overside, if you please,Captain Bruce. I'm sending my nephew aboard to talk business with you."

"I will talk no business before daylight," roared Captain Bruce. "Call your boat back."

"Oh, yes, you *will* take him aboard," stormed Captain Wetherly. "*If you don't, the underwriters will know the reason why.* Shall I tell *you* why?"

"Hooray! but that was a shot below his waterline," chuckled Bill McKnight from the engine-room door. "But I don't envy Dan his job when Jerry Pringle climbs aboard the *Kenilworth.*"

CHAPTER IV

WICKED MR. PRINGLE IN COLLISION

In his cooler moments Captain Wetherly might not have ordered Dan Frazier to board the stranded *Kenilworth* before daylight, for a heavy sea was running along the Reef. But he knew there was smoother water in the lee of the stranded steamer and he had reason for confidence in his boat's crew. He had been foolhardy in bringing his tug so close, but he was in no mood to weigh risks; and he was ready to back Dan to play a man's part in this game for high stakes.

Dan had learned to do as he was told without asking why, but as he peered from his plunging yawl at the tall, black hulk of the helpless *Kenilworth*, his hands were shaking and his lips were dry. Although the seas did not break over the Reef because of the depth of water, they threatened to smash the yawl against the steamer's side. Presently a lantern crept down from the

deck above like a huge fire-fly. It was tied to one of the lower rounds of a swaying rope ladder, at the sight of which Dan gathered himself for the ordeal. As the yawl rose he jumped headlong, got a grip on the ladder, and hung on for dear life while a frothing sea washed over him. Gasping for breath, bruised and dazed, he fought his way up the side and fell over the bulwark of the after well-deck.

Dan had not the slightest idea of what he was expected to do on board the *Kenilworth*, but after two seamen had stood him on his feet he limped forward in search of Captain Bruce. Oddly enough, he did not feel in the least afraid of meeting the hostile ship-master whose wicked plans had been spoiled by the coming of the *Resolute*. Dan recalled the big, brown-bearded man with the deep voice and the kindly eyes whom he had met in Pensacola harbor, and said to himself, as he had said then: "He looks like too fine a man." But as Captain Jim's agent, Dan braced himself to be stern and dignified while he clambered to the bridge.

He found Captain Bruce standing in the light that fell from the chart-room door.

"I am to stay aboard until further orders from Captain Wetherly, sir," announced Dan in the heaviest voice he could muster.

"Nobody asked you, so get away from my quarters," was the irritable reply. Dan stepped forward into the light and Captain Bruce stared at him with puzzled interest. Then his frown cleared and he exclaimed heartily:

"Why, it's the lad that fished me out of Pensacola harbor. I ought not to forget you, had I? Pardon my rude manners, but a man with his ship in peril is poor company. Come inside. Well, upon my word, this is a most extraordinary reunion all round."

The stalwart master mariner was trying hard to wear his usual manner, but his words came out with jerky, nervous haste, his gaze shifted uneasily, and he was twisting both hands in his beard. If his conscience had been troubling him before, panic fear had now come to torment him; fear of Captain Wetherly; fear even of this boy, for no mere chance could have brought about this midnight meeting on the Reef. In silence Dan followed him into the chart-room and waited while Captain Bruce seemed to for-

get himself in gloomy reflection. With an effort the master of the *Kenilworth* looked at the boy and began to explain:

"I hope Captain Wetherly did not take offence. I am responsible for the safety of this ship, and until I can get in touch with my owners my word is final. If I can get her off without help, it means saving a whacking big salvage bill. She is making no water, and is in little danger."

Dan knew enough of the ways of seafaring men to be surprised that this captain should stoop to explain matters to the deck-hand of a tug. But the captain's word did not ring true. He was trying to play a part, and Dan saw through it and was sorry for him.

"You don't know the Reef," replied the boy. "You struck it in good weather. And Captain Jim Wetherly is no robber. He would not stand by if he thought you were not going to need him and need him bad. *We* don't do any crooked business aboard the *Resolute*, sir."

Dan had not meant to deal this last home-thrust. He was one lone-handed boy in the enemy's camp. Captain Bruce flushed and looked hard at Dan, not so much with anger as

with unhappy doubt and anxiety. He did not reply and appeared to be struggling with his thoughts. Dan was so worn out with excitement and loss of sleep that he had to blink hard at the swinging lamp to keep his eyes open, and after several minutes of silence, Captain Bruce's face seemed to waver in a kind of haze. Dan aroused himself with a start when the master of the *Kenilworth* spoke the question that was uppermost in his thoughts:

"How did your tow-boat happen to find me to-night? What were you doing out here, boy?"

Dan's drowsiness fled as if a gun had been fired in the room. What could be say? If he told the truth he might be knocked on the head and dropped overboard before daylight. Deeds as bad as this had been done on the Reef, and he was the only witness to back up Captain Jim's story of a plot to wreck the steamer. He could only stammer:

"We were running to the north'ard and saw your signals. Captain Wetherly commands the *Resolute*. You must ask him."

"He threatened and bulldozed me to-night," exclaimed Captain Bruce. "I let you come

on board because he treated me kindly at Pensacola. I will give him my answer at daylight."

Dan leaned forward with his elbows on the table and looked up into the captain's face. Mustering all his courage, he began to say what was in his heart, as if he were talking to one of his own friends who had done something to be sorry for:

"Captain Wetherly is working for your interests, sir. He knows the Reef better than any pilot out of Key West. If he says he can get your steamer off, he'll do it. And—and—he wants to save you—your ship—no matter what it costs him. It—it—isn't only to get ahead of Jerry Pringle on a wrecking job, Captain. He likes you, and Barton Pringle is my chum, and Mrs. Pringle is my mother's dearest friend, and Captain Jim wants to get you clear and on your voyage again without—without being forced to—to fight it out to a finish with you and Jerry Pringle. It's for Bart and his mother, and for you, too, Captain Bruce."

The ship-master walked to the doorway and stood gazing out into the night. Then he replied gruffly with a hard laugh:

"You are almost asleep, my boy. I can't make head or tail of what you are driving at. I make my own bargains with tugs when I need them. Lie down on the transom and take forty winks. I am going to start my engines again and work my vessel off on this tide."

Dan nodded and promptly curled up on the leather cushions. Daylight showed through the port-holes when he awoke and stepped out on deck. A few cable-lengths to seaward rolled the *Resolute*. Astern of her was the *Henry Foster*. Beating up the Hawk Channel inside the Reef came two schooners under clouds of canvas. Other sails flecked the sea to the southward, all hastening toward the *Kenilworth*. From among the low islets to the westward the smaller craft of the "Conchs," or scattered dwellers on the Keys, were speeding toward the scene. The *Kenilworth* lay with a list to port, her bow shoved high on the invisible Reef, her stern still afloat. It would have been hard to convince a landlubber that this great steamer was in danger of going to pieces. No seas were breaking around her. She looked as if she had come to a standstill in mid ocean.

Dan Frazier had the love of the sea in him. The sight of this helpless ship as he saw her by daylight appealed to him as tremendously sad and tragic. He picked up a sounding lead and let it fall over the side to find the depth of water amidships, for a glance at the chart-room clock had told him that the tide was almost at the flood. The sound of voices made him look aft. Captain Bruce was coming forward with Jeremiah Pringle, and behind them was Barton. A moment later, Captain Jim Wetherly threw a leg over the steamer's rail and shouted to his men in the yawl to wait for him. He ran forward to Dan without speaking to the others as he passed them, and shoving his nephew toward Captain Bruce he exclaimed:

"Here's my man, aboard your ship hours ahead of Pringle. You'll have to talk business with me first. And all I ask is a square deal."

Barton hung back and acted as if he had caught the spirit of the hostile rivalry that threatened an explosion of some kind. He was more highly strung and impulsive than Dan, less used to knocking about among men, and he felt that Dan was somehow taking sides against

him. Before Captain Bruce could speak, Jerry Pringle strode up with an ugly scowl on his lean, dark face and said:

"Let Wetherly talk terms. When he gets through, I will be ready to sign a paper to take charge of the job for half the figure he names, I don't care how low he goes."

"That ought to settle it. You can't do as well as that, Captain Wetherly," put in the master of the *Kenilworth.* "If you are so sure my ship can be pulled off, I see no reason why Captain Pringle isn't the man to do it."

Captain Jim was trying to keep his temper under, but the fact that these two men were trying to carry out their vile agreement right under his nose was more than he could stand. He shook his heavy fist in Jerry Pringle's face and declared:

"The *Resolute* will make fast to this ship this morning. And if you want the *Henry Foster* to get action, it will be under my orders, and at my terms. By Judas, this play-acting ends right here. I mean you, too, Captain Bruce. I have been hoping that I could keep my mouth shut. I'd rather cut off my right hand than

drag certain other people into it. I know why you brought your boy along with you, Jerry Pringle. To put a stopper on my tongue, wasn't it? Hide behind women and children, eh? Well, I'm in charge of wrecking this steamer, understand? Get back to your tug. I've a good mind to——"

He felt a pull at his arm, and turned to look into Dan's imploring face as the boy whispered:

"Don't say any more, Uncle Jim. Wait till Bart is out of the way, please, oh please do."

Captain Jim rammed his hands in his breeches pockets and addressed Captain Bruce:

"I've said my last word. My hawser will come aboard at once."

The master of the *Kenilworth* wavered and looked at Jerry Pringle as if appealing to the stronger will which had tempted and entrapped him. The hapless ship-master had gone too far with the plot to let it go by the board. Pringle muttered with a sneer:

"Who is master of this steamer, anyhow?"

Captain Bruce echoed the remark:

"I command this ship, Captain Wetherly, and the sooner you leave her the better."

Wasting no more words, Captain Jim called to his boat's crew to stand by to take him off, and said to Dan:

"Pringle is going back to his tug. You stay here. They won't dare to do you any harm. Keep your eyes and ears open."

Presently Bart followed his father on board the *Henry Foster*. Dan had found no chance to talk with him and he was not sorry. He was afraid Bart would ask him what Captain Jim's angry speech had meant. Already the stranding of the *Kenilworth* had dragged the two lads into its tangle of motives and events.

Dan was too absorbed in wondering what Captain Jim could do next to dwell long with his own troubles and perplexities. He watched the *Resolute* steam nearer the *Kenilworth*, while Captain Wetherly's deck-crew gathered around the huge coils of steel hawser on the overhang. Soon the *Henry Foster* wallowed closer and her men were also busy making ready to pay out a towing hawser. Dan could not understand how Captain Jim was going to get his line aboard the *Kenilworth*, and he breathlessly awaited the next move.

On board the *Resolute*, Captain Wetherly was standing at the wheel and watching the *Henry Foster* with the light of battle in his gray eyes. Jerry Pringle's tug had forged ahead until she lay square in the path of the *Resolute* which was thus prevented from getting into position for taking hold of the steamer on the Reef.

Captain Jim pulled the whistle cord and the *Resolute* clamored to the other tug to move out of the way. But Mr. Pringle seemed determined to remain exactly where he was. Again and again the *Resolute's* whistle was sounded, but the *Henry Foster* refused to make room. Captain Wetherly finally growled to the mate:

"He doesn't seem to have very good manners, does he? Maybe he ought to be taught a lesson. Take the wheel while I go below and have a few words with Mr. McKnight."

The chief engineer was leaning against a stanchion and muttering insults at the balky *Henry Foster*, with special emphasis on the shortcomings of Mr. J. Pringle.

"Are you going to sit here all day and let those *Henry Fosters* laugh at you, Captain?" asked McKnight.

"Not if you have steam enough to do as I tell you, Bill. All I want you to do is to jump her ahead for all she's worth when I ring the jingle bell. Then hold on tight and say your prayers."

"Going to push Pringle out of the way?" asked the engineer with a smile of happy anticipation. "Well, there's steam enough to make the *Henry Foster* know she's been bumped. It's about time something happened."

The captain returned to the wheel-house and gave the signal to back her. The *Resolute* slipped very slowly astern until she was in a position for a "running start." As a final warning her whistle was blown, without reply from the *Henry Foster.* Then, with one long blast like a war-whoop, the *Resolute* moved straight ahead, gathering headway until her rearing bow was flinging cascades of spray. The mate gasped:

"Keep her off, Captain, or you'll be in collision."

Captain Wetherly grinned and nodded as he held his tug straight at the after part of the *Henry Foster* on board of which there was much shouting and running to and fro.

Her crew had taken it for granted that the

Resolute would pass astern of them until her tall cut-water loomed within a hundred feet of their overhang. Then her engine-room bells ding-donged one frantic signal after another, but she began to move too late. *Crash!* and she heeled far over from the shock of the collision. Like a keen-edged axe through a soft timber, the bow of the *Resolute*, with her weight and momentum behind it, sheared through the overhang and sliced a dozen feet off the stern of the luckless *Henry Foster*. It was done and over within a twinkling. The *Resolute* ploughed on with headway almost unchecked, and as her horrified mate rushed forward to see what damage had been done to her own hull, Captain Jim Wetherly looked back and remarked to himself:

"As neat a job as I ever saw. Her after bulkhead will keep her afloat, but the *Henry Foster* is surely shy her tail-feathers. I guess that winds up her career as a tow-boat for some time. Jerry Pringle looks kind of upset and agitated."

Mr. Pringle had picked himself up from the deck, where he had been hurled headlong, and was wildly shaking his fist at the *Resolute*. The crippled tug was drifting off broadside and was

evidently helpless. Presently a small boat put off from her and headed for the *Resolute.* As soon as he was within shouting distance, Jerry Pringle rose in the stern-sheets and yelled in a voice broken with rage:

"You'll pay for my vessel, Jim Wetherly. You run her down on purpose. She'll founder or drift on the Reef if you don't tow me to Key West."

"You violated all the rules of the road," sung back Captain Jim. "And you're so fond of wrecking other people's vessels, supposing you see what kind of a job you can make of the *Henry Foster.* Tow you to Key West? You're joking. I'm going to put my line aboard the *Kenilworth* and I'll settle with you later."

Dan was dancing up and down on the *Kenilworth's* deck as he stared at this amazing collision. It might be a reckless and lawless thing to do, but Dan saw that Jerry Pringle had brought the disaster upon himself, and that it had given Captain Jim a clear field. Throwing his cap in the air, Dan let out a series of shrill and joyous war-whoops. He had forgotten all about Barton, but in the midst of his noisy

jubilation he caught sight of his chum standing aft on the *Henry Foster* and peering down at the havoc made by the collision. Dan's voice must have carried across the water, for Bart turned to look at the *Kenilworth* and shook his fist with every sign of rage and resentment. Dan subsided, but the mischief had been done. He had made an enemy of Barton, and he muttered with a sorrowful face:

"I can't blame him for getting mad as a hornet at me. I ought to have kept still. I don't know how we can ever patch up this misunderstanding either. He ought to hold his daddy responsible for thinking he could monkey with Uncle Jim Wetherly and the *Resolute*."

CHAPTER V

"ALL HANDS ABANDON SHIP!"

NOBODY was more dumfounded by the ramming of the tug *Henry Foster* than Captain Bruce of the steamer aground on the Reef. In a twinkling his wicked partnership with Jeremiah Pringle had been smashed beyond mending. He could no longer refuse to accept help from the victorious *Resolute*. This meant that Captain Jim Wetherly would take charge of the wrecking of the steamer and try to save her and her cargo by every means in his power. Jerry Pringle had been driven from the scene. He was on board his shattered tug which was drifting to the southward, in no great danger of going ashore, while several schooners were clustering around to give her aid.

Dan Frazier paid no attention to Captain Bruce, but ran to the stern of the *Kenilworth* to watch the *Resolute's* crew send its towing hawser aboard. Captain Jim was at his best in such

an undertaking as this, and his men were obeying his shouted orders with disciplined skill and haste. The hawser writhed after the yawl like a sea-serpent and was dragged up the side of the stranded vessel by her own crew, who were jubilant at seeing active operations under way. When the line was made fast, Captain Jim bellowed through his megaphone:

"We have wasted time and lost the best of the tide, Captain Bruce, but I'm going to pull for an hour anyhow. Set your engines going full speed astern and throw your helm to port."

Captain Bruce obeyed with eager energy. He seemed to be coming to himself and honestly anxious to get his ship afloat. His broad shoulders were thrown back, and he held his head erect, while his deep voice had a tone of masterful decision. If he had made a compact with the Evil One, he acted like a man who regretted the bargain and wanted to repair the damage already done. Fate had suddenly snatched him out of the clutches of Jeremiah Pringle and perhaps he was glad of it. At least, Dan Frazier was ready to look at it in this way, and as Captain Bruce came aft to examine the hawser the

lad said to himself with a wisdom born of his own experience:

"Last night he kind of behaved like a boy that had done something he was awful ashamed of, but was scared to own up to it. Now he looks as if he felt the way I do when I've decided to tell mother all about it and promise her I'll do the best I can to make things all square again."

Dan found time to take an anxious look at the weather, and a sweeping survey of sea and sky told him why Captain Jim did not want to wait for the next flood tide before beginning work. The ocean had turned from green and blue to a dull gray. The clouds were low and far-spread and the wind was seesawing in fretful gusts, now from the north-east, again from the north-west. The barometer had sought a lower level overnight, and all these signs declared that a gale was brewing. If it came out of the north-west, the charging seas would drive the *Kenilworth* farther on the Reef and perhaps lift her clear across the coral barrier to sink, with a broken back, in the deep water of the Hawk Channel.

The *Resolute's* whistle signalled that she was ready to match her power against the Reef. As she forged ahead, the sagging hawser tautened and twanged like a huge banjo string, while the sea was churned to froth in her wake. At the same time the *Kenilworth's* engines lent their mighty strength to the task. Her hull vibrated as if the rivets were being pulled from their steel plates, but the keel did not move an inch. Dan's faith in Captain Jim's word was so implicit that he expected to feel the steamer start seaward in the first ten minutes. At the end of the hour, however, the *Resolute* was still tugging away without result, like a man trying to lift himself by his boot-straps. Then she slackened up on the hawser as if to get her breath for the next tussle.

The wind was blowing with more and more violence. It picked up the white-topped seas and hurled them high against the *Kenilworth*, while the tug rolled and plunged amid driving foam and spray. Gulls were flying in from seaward to seek the shelter of the distant keys. But it was not yet rough enough to daunt Captain Jim Wetherly and he was evidently waiting

to make a second attempt on the afternoon tide. Dan had seen these northerly gales blow themselves out in a few hours and he felt no uneasiness at being left in the *Kenilworth*, although he muttered to himself as he felt the helpless steamer tremble to the shock of the seas:

"I don't see why Uncle Jim left me here now that Pringle is out of the way. I guess he hasn't time to remember that he is shy one deck-hand."

There was some truth in this surmise, for Captain Wetherly was having all he could do to keep the *Resolute* at her station and her propeller clear of the hawser which he refused to let go because he feared the weather might make it impossible to lower the yawl for another trip to the *Kenilworth*. He knew what Captain Bruce was not aware of, that the steamer had been shoved on a shelving slope of the Reef where she could withstand a terrific pounding without having the bottom torn out of her, and that if she once started to move astern she would quickly slide off into deep water. Therefore Captain Jim was ready to take long chances with his tug before he would run to Key West for refuge from wind and sea.

In the afternoon, when the *Resolute* whistled that she was about to go ahead again on the hawser, the green billows were breaking over her bow and flooding aft in booming torrents. Her funnel was white with sea-salt from the spindrift as she plunged and reared like a bucking bronco. Dan was watching the laboring *Resolute* from the stranded steamer's bridge when Captain Bruce put a hand on his shoulder and said with hearty frankness:

"That skipper of yours is plucky, and he is a first-class seaman. But he will lose his vessel if he stays out here much longer."

"He may have to give you a wider berth by dark," said Dan. "In ordinary weather he could take the *Resolute* over the Reef along here, but now the seas would pick her up and drop her on the ledges. I guess he will have to leave me aboard here overnight, Captain. There's no getting a boat over to me now. And he can't take the *Resolute* to leeward of you, on the inside of the Reef, for there isn't a deep water passage through, for miles and miles."

"You are welcome to stay aboard with me, lad," replied Captain Bruce. "We may have

a tough time of it ourselves before morning, and I fancy your uncle is sorry he did not take you off with him. But that can't be helped."

The *Resolute* had begun to pull. It was a thrilling battle to watch. The seas were so heavy that her power was applied in a series of tremendous lunges which threatened to snap the hawser every time her stern rose skyward. Dan held his breath and gripped the rail with both hands as the tug surged ahead again and again. Her mate and two deck-hands were crouched far aft, ready to cast loose the hawser whenever the captain dared to hold on no longer. After a while Dan saw the chief engineer waddle back to the overhang to take a look at the situation. There was something cheering in the sight of this bulky, stout-hearted veteran of many a desperate venture at sea. Bill McKnight plucked off his cap and waved it in greeting to Dan, as if signalling him that all was well.

"I guess he's clamped down his safety-valve long before this," said Dan aloud as he flourished an arm at Bill McKnight.

"My word but you are a desperate lot,"

observed Captain Bruce, and a smile lightened his anxious face and weary eyes. "I think we are safer aboard the *Kenilworth*."

He turned away to talk to his own chief engineer and his first officer. They had come up from below to report that the crew were beginning to talk of quitting the ship, and that it was hard to keep them at their stations. The news aroused Captain Bruce like a bugle-call to action. If he had been weak in an hour of temptation he was now once more the able, resolute shipmaster, trained by long years at sea to face such a crisis as this.

"Do the cowards want to abandon ship while we are trying to work her off?" he thundered. "Look at that tug-boat out yonder. She isn't afraid to stay by us in a bit of a breeze. Come along with me. I'll handle them."

He hurried after the first officer, and Dan was left alone to gaze at the brave struggle of the *Resolute*. It seemed impossible that she could hold on much longer. Her hull was buried by one sea after another, but she shook herself free and plunged ahead with dogged, unflinching power. The afternoon was nearly spent. A

stormy dusk was beginning to steal over the tossing sea.

Dan perceived that Captain Jim was trying to stand to his task until high water might help to lift the *Kenilworth*. But for once that square-jawed uncle of his had dared too much. The *Resolute* had endured more than steel and timber could be expected to endure. Dan yelled with dismay as he saw the massive timber framework of the towing-bitts fairly jump out of the deck, splintered and broken, and vanish in the sea astern while the hawser slackened and buried itself in the waves. The mate and deck-hands were hurled this way and that. An instant later the wind bore a terrific crashing noise to Dan's ears. A gaping hole showed in her after deck as the *Resolute* dove ahead, suddenly released from her grip on the *Kenilworth*.

"Great Scott, she jerked the towing-bitts clean out of her," cried Dan. "It was just like pulling the stem out of an apple. Now we *are* done for. Is anybody killed?"

His eyes filled with hot tears as he saw Bill McKnight rush aft and help pick up the mate and deck-hands who lay sprawled in the scup-

pers. The mate was huddled in a heap where he had been flung, and the rescuers dragged him clear and carried him forward between them, his legs and arms swaying limp.

"He looks dead," moaned Dan. "And it leaves Uncle Jim single-handed. He can't run home before this sea with a hole in his after deck like that. She'd swamp in no time. He'll have to buck into it and try to fetch Miami. And we can't get any help to him."

The *Resolute* steamed very slowly away from the Reef, fighting for her life. Three long blasts from her whistle came down the wind as she spoke her farewell. Before long her reeling shape was lost to view on the shadowy sea; then her mast-head light gleamed for a little longer before she wholly vanished from Dan Frazier's yearning gaze.

Captain Bruce had rushed on deck at the sound of her whistle and Dan pointed to the dim outline of the beaten and crippled *Resolute* while in a voice broken with grief and excitement he explained what had happened to the tug.

"Uncle Jim will have other tugs on the way as soon as he can wire for them," added Dan.

But for once that square-jawed uncle of his had dared too much

"I think he ordered a schooner to run to Miami this morning with orders for more help to be sent you."

"They can't get out to us until this blow is over," said the captain. "We are in for a bad night, my boy. I wish you were out of it. But Captain Wetherly couldn't have taken you off to save his soul."

"I wouldn't have been here if you had been square—" Dan began to say with a sudden rush of anger. But it seemed as though Captain Bruce had not heard him, for he went on to say:

"If my boy had lived he would have been about your age now, Dan. He was just your kind of a youngster, too. Go below and get some supper, and some sleep if you can."

There was to be little sleep aboard the *Kenilworth* through this night. The gale had no more than begun to blow when the *Resolute* was forced to retreat. Long before midnight it was lashing the shoal water of the Reef into huge breakers which assailed the *Kenilworth* with thundering fury. Her keel began to pound as she was lifted and driven a little farther on the Reef by one shock after another. The decks

sloped more and more until it was not easy to keep a foothold. The noise of the water breaking over her hull, the booming cry of the wind, the groaning and grating and shrieking of her steel plates as the Reef strove to pull them asunder, made it seem as if the steamer could not hold together until daylight.

The grimy men from the engine-room and stoke-hole had fled to the shelter of the steel deck-houses where they huddled with the seamen, shouting to each other in English, Norwegian, and Spanish. Captain Bruce and his officers finally gathered in the chart-room and discussed the chances of launching the boats if matters should grow much worse. Dan Frazier was doubled up in a corner chair, half-dead for sleep, but fighting hard to keep his wits about him and tell the others what he knew of the Reef and the water that stretched to leeward of the ship.

In answer to a question from Captain Bruce he said:

"This is the narrowest part of the Reef, Captain Wetherly told me, and if you can get your boats away in the lee of the ship and keep them

afloat through the breaking water you will be in the Hawk Channel, only three miles from a string of keys. The channels between the islands are deep enough for a ship's boat. You don't need any chart to find smooth water in those lagoons, sir."

"Her bottom plates are opening up," growled the chief engineer who had just come up to report. "The sea is coming in fast. It has begun to flood the fire-room, and I can't make steam to keep the pumps going much longer."

"The bulkheads forward are twisting like so much paper," added the first officer. "They can't stand up if she racks herself any worse. Then she will be flooded fore and aft."

Captain Bruce jumped to his feet and gruffly broke into this dismal kind of talk:

"Get all the men you can and come below with me. Her after part is still afloat and tight, and if we can brace the midship bulkheads with enough timbers and cargo, they may hold for a while yet."

It was a forlorn hope, but even the seamen and stokers were glad to be doing something to save the ship, and most of them rallied to the

call of the captain and mate and followed them down into the gloomy hold. Dan went along to try to do what he could, and also because he remembered that Captain Jim had told him to "keep his eyes and ears open."

"If we abandon the *Kenilworth*," thought Dan, "and I see Uncle Jim again, the first thing he will ask me is what shape we left the steamer in—had she begun to break in two, and how badly was she flooded, and so on. I guess it's part of my job to find out all I can."

He picked up a lantern which had been overlooked and crept after the men, down one slippery iron ladder after another. It was a terrifying trip below decks where the angry ocean sounded as if it were about to tear its way through the vessel's side, amid an awful hubbub of shifting cargo, and breaking beams and plates. Dan hesitated more than once and tried to choke down his fear. He was in strange quarters and the men ahead of him, used to finding their way all over the vessel, moved much faster than he. They had reached the engine-room and were moving forward while he was still clinging to the last ladder. Then

a lurch of the ship dashed his lantern against the hand-rail. The glass globe was smashed and the light went out.

The electric lighting plant had been disabled and the cavern of an engine-room was in black darkness as Dan vainly searched his pockets for matches. He heard faint shouts from somewhere forward and thought he saw the gleam of lanterns. He tried to grope his way toward them, but stumbled and fell against a steel column. With aching head he staggered to his feet just as the whole hull of the ship seemed to be raised bodily and let fall on the Reef with a deafening crash. Dan was more frightened and confused than ever. A moment later his feet began to splash in water. He thought the sea had broken into the engine-room, and he tried, with frantic haste, to find his way back to the ladder and regain the deck above. By this time he had completely lost his bearings. He did not know whether he was going toward the bow or stern. At length his trembling fingers clutched the rail of a ladder which ran upward from a narrow passageway. It led him to another deck still far down in the vessel's hold,

where he could find no more ladders to climb. After what seemed to him hours of feeling his way this way and that, he bumped against a solid steel wall. Dan knew it was a bulkhead of some kind, but it must be far from the toiling crew of the ship, for he had long since ceased to hear or see them. He had never been in such utter darkness nor so hopelessly lost and bewildered.

The frightened lad shouted for help, but his voice could not have been heard a dozen feet away, so great was the din around him. He tried to think, to get back his sense of direction, to feel his way along the bulkhead in the hope of getting his hands on some object with whose outline he was familiar, which might tell him into what part of the ship he had wandered.

He was leaning against the steel wall of the bulkhead when it buckled, sprang back, and then quivered as if it had been a sheet of tin. There was a tremendous noise of crackling, rending timber and steel above Dan's head. He whirled about and tried to flee as he heard the collapsing bulkhead give way.

The boy could hear the cargo toppling toward

him with the roar of a landslide. He threw up his arms to shield his head, then something struck him in the back and hurled him to one side. He fell across a bulky box of some kind while other heavy boxes, a deluge of them, thundered from above and crashed all round him. Dan cowered in a frightened heap, expecting every instant to have his life crushed out. But gradually the descent of the cargo ceased, and he was still alive.

He tried to move his legs and found they had not been smashed. Struggling to turn over on his back he put up his arms and discovered that a huge packing case had so fallen as to make a bridge over him and keep clear the little space in which he crouched. But he was walled in by packing cases on all sides and he struggled in vain to move them. Until his fingers were torn and bleeding and his strength worn out, Dan tried to make an opening large enough to wriggle through and escape from this appalling prison.

When at length he lay still and panted aloud the prayers his mother had taught him, there came the echo of hoarse shouts above the clamor of the ship and the sea. Through a crevice

between the boxes of freight that penned him fast he glimpsed the gleam of moving lanterns. The captain and crew were deserting the hold of the ship. Dan tried to call to them but his cries were unheard.

The shouts ceased, the gleams of light vanished one by one, and Dan was left alone in the flooded and shattered hold of the *Kenilworth*. Far above him Captain Bruce and his crew were making ready their life-boats, preferring to trust themselves to the storm-swept sea than to the steamer which they believed doomed to be torn to fragments within the next few hours.

"They must have given up the fight," moaned Dan between his sobs. "I guess it means all hands abandon ship at daylight. And they will think I've been washed overboard in the dark."

CHAPTER VI

DAN FRAZIER'S PREDICAMENT

IMPRISONED as he was in the hold of the *Kenilworth*, and feeling sure that the steamer was to be abandoned by her crew as a hopeless wreck, Dan Frazier became almost stupefied with terror and exhaustion. As long as there was any strength in his athletic young body he had pushed and tugged at the mass of freight which penned him in, shouting in his frenzy until his voice failed him and died away in hoarse, broken weeping.

At length his benumbed senses lost themselves in heavy slumber. He dreamed of being at home with his mother in the palm-shaded cottage and she was holding him in her lap and stroking his forehead with her cool hands. But nightmares came to drive away this sweet dream, and he awoke with a choking cry for help.

Dan thought he must have been asleep for

hours and hours. More torturing than the realization of his dreadful plight was his burning thirst. But his brain was clearer and he listened to the medley of noises around him with a glimmer of hope. The water had not reached the deck on which he had been trapped, although he could hear it washing to and fro in the bottom of the hold below. The hull of the ship had ceased to pound on the Reef. The breakers beat against her steel sides and fell solid on her upper decks with a sound like distant thunder, but Dan began to feel confident that the gale was blowing itself out and the steamer was going to live through it.

He thanked God that he had not been drowned, at any rate, even though he seemed likely to perish where he was for lack of food and drink. Youth grasps at slender hopes and finds strength in dubious consolations. Dan had expected to be overwhelmed by the sea without a ghost of a chance to fight for his life. Now that this peril seemed to be passing, his wits began to return, and he fished his strong bladed sailor's clasp-knife from his trousers pocket. To hack away at his prison walls was better

than doing nothing. He twisted painfully about until he had located the widest crevices between the sides of the packing-cases and began to chip away at the stout planking. It was a task tedious and wearisome beyond words. There was no light, his nerves were unstrung, and he worked with unsteady, groping hand. Rats scampered over him, or squealed in the darkness close by, and he slashed at them savagely. They startled him so that more than once he gave up the task and wept like a little child.

At length Dan cut through the planking of a box which was wedged fast between two larger ones and his knife clinked against tin. He managed to break off a splintered end of board and pulled out a round can of some kind of provisions. This was unexpected good fortune, and he carefully cut into the lid with a muttered prayer of thanksgiving, hoping to find enough liquid to wet his parched tongue. The can proved to be full of French peas, packed in enough water to supply a long drink of cool, refreshing soup. Dan scooped up the tiny peas with his fingers, emptied the tin, and eagerly drove his knife into another of them. The

nourishment made him feel like a giant. He returned to his task with genuine hope of being able to whittle a way out of his trap.

But as the weary hours dragged by, and the strokes of the knife became more and more feeble, the prisoner gave himself up to despair. His strength had ebbed so fast that he slumped down and slept with his face in his arms.

A great noise awoke him. The cargo was shifting and tumbling with fearful uproar. From below came the rumble of coal sliding across the bunkers. The deck rolled violently and pitched Dan to the other end of his pen. He expected to be crushed by the cargo, and thought the ship must be turning over. But the commotion gradually ceased and, to his great astonishment, he was alive and unhurt. The deck seemed to have much less slant than before. He raised his arms and they touched nothing over his head. Unable to realize the truth, he scrambled to his feet and stood upright. The great package of freight which had roofed him over had slid clear, carrying along the boxes piled above it. Frantic with new hope of release, Dan clambered upward, tearing his clothes

to tatters, plunging headlong from one obstacle to another, bruising his face, hands, and knees against sharp edges and corners. Scrambling over the disordered cargo until he had to halt to get his breath, Dan gasped to himself:

"I can't get on deck through a freight compartment. The hatches will be fastened down above. I must find out how I blundered in here as far as the broken bulkhead."

A moment later he fetched up against solid tiers of cargo which had not been dislodged and knew he must be headed wrong. This gave him a clue, however, and with fast-failing strength he stumbled back over the way he had come. At last he saw a streak of daylight filter down from a skylight far above. Yes, there was a road to the upper deck. Dan glimpsed the shadowy outline of a ladder. It was all he could do to muster courage to attempt the long and dizzy climb. But he set his teeth and clung like a barnacle to one round after another until he fell against the iron door of a deck-house, fumbled with the fastening, and tottered out into daylight.

Half-blinded and blinking like an owl, Dan

Frazier covered his face with his hands until his eyes could bear the dazzling reflection of sea and sky which were flooded with glorious sunshine. The wind sang through the shrouds and funnel-stays and the blue ocean upheaved in swollen billows, but the gale had passed. Dan's bewildered gaze fell upon the empty chocks, the dangling falls and the davits swung outboard, where the steamer's life-boats had been. These signs were enough to tell him that the ship had been abandoned. He was left alone in her, and he went forward with a feeling of uncanny isolation. Water to drink was what he wanted more than anything else, and before making a survey of the ship he sought the tank in the chart-room and fairly guzzled his fill. Then he made a ferocious onslaught on the cabin pantry and carried on deck a kettle full of cold boiled potatoes, beef and hard bread, and climbed to the battered bridge.

Looking down at the steamer from this lofty perch, Dan understood what had caused the violent roll and lunge that set him free from his prison below decks. The storm had driven her, head-on, far up the outer slope of the Reef,

where she had lain as if about to break in pieces, with the seas washing clean over her. But while her forward compartments had filled with water, her stern was still buoyant. When the gale had subsided the ship was hanging over the deep water on the inner side of the Reef, and the next high tide had lifted her stern so that she slid bow-first, for half her length, down the opposite side of the shelf which had held her keel fast. It looked like a miracle to Dan, but here was the ship still solid under his feet. Gazing down from one end of the bridge, he could see the inner edge of the Reef shimmering far down through the clear water and the hull of the *Kenilworth*, hanging only by the after part.

"Where, oh where, is Uncle Jim?" he thought. "He might patch up her bulkheads, lift the water out with his wrecking pumps, and pull her off yet. And I'll bet he'd keep her afloat somehow."

Then a stupendous thought flashed into Dan's mind. It was such a dazzling, gorgeous idea that it made him dizzy with delight. Yes, it was all true. The *Kenilworth* had been abandoned by her captain and crew as a wreck.

She was like a derelict at sea. Whoever should find and board her would have the right to claim heavy salvage on the vessel and her cargo if they were saved and brought into port. It was the unwritten law of the Reef that the first man to set foot on an abandoned wreck was the wrecking master, to be obeyed as such, with first claim on salvage.

Dan tried to arrange his thoughts in some kind of order, and at length he said to himself with an air of decision:

"The wrecking master on this job is Daniel P. Frazier. I earned it all right, and Key West will back me up whether Jerry Pringle likes it or not. And I'm going to hold her down till Uncle Jim comes back. There can't be any more question about who has the wrecking of her. General cargo, too!—I'll bet it's worth several hundred thousand dollars!—and a four thousand ton steel steamer. If we can save her, the owners will have to give up fifty or a hundred thousand dollars in clean salvage money."

The weight of his responsibility soon tamed Dan's high spirits. He could make no resistance if a crew of hostile wreckers should happen

along to dispute his title in the absence of Captain Jim Wetherly. The morning sun was no more than three hours high. He must watch and wait through a long, long day, any hour of which might bring in sight the sails of a fleet of wrecking schooners. Dan reckoned that he had been penned below for about thirty hours and that this was the morning of the second day after the wreck. Captain Jim must have a tug on the way by this time. But, on the other hand, if Captain Bruce and his men had been picked up and carried to Key West, their tidings would send Jerry Pringle and his horde of wreckers flying seaward by steam and sail.

Every boy who plays foot-ball has dreamed of breaking through the line, blocking a kick, scooping up the ball, and running down the field like a whirlwind to score the winning touchdown with the other eleven vainly pounding along in his wake. So most of us have dreamed of playing the hero by stopping a runaway horse, saving the life of the prettiest girl that ever was, and being splendidly rewarded by her millionaire father. Dan Frazier's pet dream had a salt-water background. It was of being the

first to find an abandoned ship with a rich cargo, triumphantly bringing her into port, and winning a fortune in salvage. At last he had found his ship, but the lone hero had an elephant on his hands.

Dan was too weary in body and mind to roam about the steamer. He rigged a bit of awning on the bridge, dragged a mattress up from below, and lay gazing through the rents in the canvas weather screen until noon. A mail steamer northward-bound passed close to the Reef, slowed down to make sure the crew had left the wreck, and ploughed on her way. Dan grew tired of looking to the southward for schooners beating up from Key West and concluded that the head wind and heavy sea were holding them in harbor. There was no black smudge of smoke to the northward to show that Captain Jim was coming out from Miami in a tow-boat. Over to seaward, however, in the east-north-east, three sails glinted like flecks of cloud. They were close together, and Dan gazed at them idly, thinking they might be coastwise merchant vessels hauling southward before the piping wind. But as they lifted

higher, he noticed that they were shaping a straight course for the Reef instead of swinging off to follow the track through the Florida Straits. They were schooners coming with great speed and showing a reckless spread of canvas.

Soon the low hulls gleamed beneath the towering piles of sail and Dan jumped to his feet as he scanned the beautiful sea picture they made.

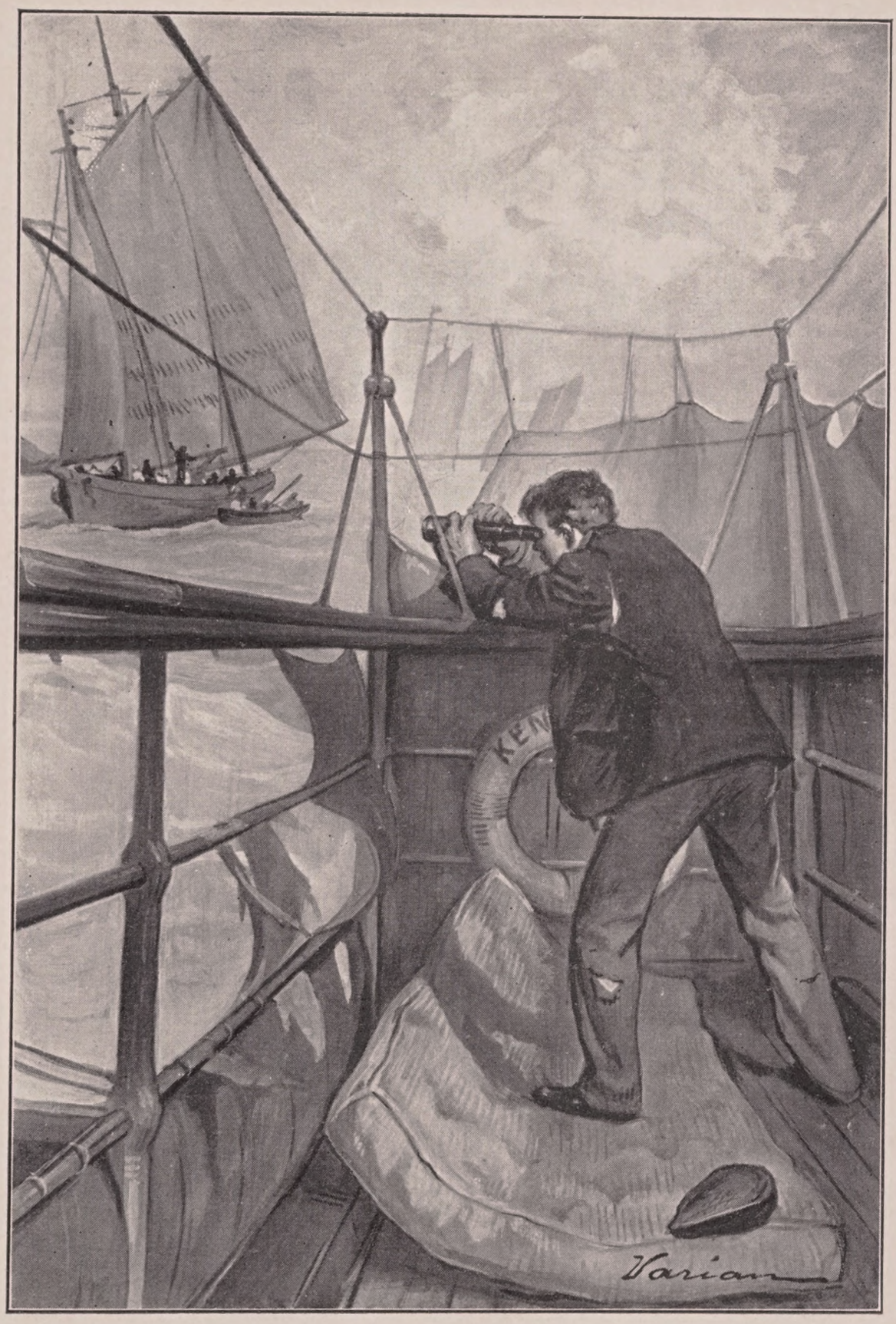
"Bahama schooners; I know their cut!" he exclaimed. "They've smelled a wreck on the Reef as sure as guns. The news must have reached Nassau by cable yesterday. And those pirates have got a clear field for once. What *can* I do? They won't listen to my story, not for a minute. They'll swarm aboard like rats and be ripping the cargo out of this vessel in a jiffy."

The youthful wrecking master was at his wits' end and his head began to throb as if it would spilt, for he had little endurance left. He remained in hiding on the bridge and tried to think out a plan of action as the Bahama schooners swooped across the frothing sea, laying their courses in a bee line for the *Kenilworth*. Dan's only hope was that he might be able to stay

aboard until Captain Jim should return to enforce the law of the Reef with his crew of hard-fisted tow-boat men to back him up. He thought of telling the wreckers that he was a stowaway, left behind when the steamer's men deserted her, but, although Dan Frazier was far from perfect, he hated the notion of lying his way out of this tight corner. He was truthful by habit, for one thing, and there was another reason which he muttered to himself:

"There's been lying enough on this job. The poor old ship has been rotten with lies ever since her skipper first ran afoul of Jerry Pringle. Even her grounding on the Reef was a lie. And I don't believe Uncle Jim would lie to save the ship, or his own skin either. No, this poor old vessel has been good to me so far. I got out of her hold by good luck and I'll trust to luck to pull me out of this scrape."

Dan picked up a pair of glasses and looked at the nearest schooner which had boldly crossed the Reef and was rounding to in the smoother water of the Hawk Channel while a group of black-skinned, ragged wreckers were shoving a boat over the side. Dan felt a new thrill of



Dan felt a new thrill of surprise and alarm

surprise and alarm as he scrutinized a burly figure poised at the schooner's rail. It was "Black Sam" Hurley, a Bahama wrecker of such evil repute that he had been pointed out to Dan in Nassau harbor as one of the notorious characters of the islands.

"There are plenty of honest wreckers in the Bahamas," said the lad to himself, while his teeth chattered. "But they don't sail with 'Black Sam.' And he was alongside the *Resolute* at Nassau, talking to the cook. He'd know me again. It's a good thing I chucked up that idea of lying out of this. It's time for me to get under cover, all right."

Dan crept off the bridge along the windward side of the deck-house and kept well out of sight of the schooners until he reached the shelter of the funnel and the engine-room skylights. Then he slipped into the nearest door and made his way to the flight of ladders up which he had climbed in the morning. He had fled in a state of panic, but one glance down into the black hold made him draw back and take measures to provision himself against a long siege below. There was no need for great haste, and Dan de-

layed to equip himself with a lantern, matches, a jug of water, and a canvas bag, crammed with food, which he slung about his neck. Then he made his way below with lighted lantern, seeking to find as secure and comfortable a refuge as possible. The Bahama wreckers would begin to loot the part of the cargo easiest to get at and handle, he reasoned, and therefore he passed by the uppermost cargo deck and explored the region below, slowly making his way aft.

It was a dangerous and desperate journey, but Dan was thinking only of keeping out of the way of "Black Sam" until Captain Jim should come back and retake the ship which belonged to him.

"I'm what the lawyers call a vital document when they're arguing a salvage case in the Key West Court," thought Dan with a half-hearted grin. "And from all I've heard of 'Black Sam' Hurley, he'd chuck this vital document overboard if he thought it might interfere with his possession of the wreck."

In this game of hide-and-seek the advantage was with the lad in the hold, and fear of discovery by the wreckers did not greatly trouble

him. After a long time he heard clamorous voices somewhere above and he doused his lantern. The wreckers seemed to be exploring the upper cargo decks. Some kind of a dispute arose and the sides of the ship flung back the echoes of it as from a great sounding board. Dan could not make out what the quarrel was about, but at length the sounds grew fainter as if the wreckers had returned to the outside world above.

Dan had felt a gush of cool wind from somewhere over his head and shifted his quarters to get beneath it and out of the reeking, stifling atmosphere of the hold. He knew it must come from a pipe running to one of the great bell-mouthed ventilators on deck and was glad that it had been turned so as to face and catch the invigorating breeze. He had not dreamed that the ventilator might serve as a speaking-tube. While he waited, however, to learn what the wreckers intended to do next, some one began to talk, and he heard every word distinctly. The voice sounded so near his ears that he was as startled as if a ghost had stepped out of the darkness. Dan jumped to his feet, his nerves all of

a quiver. He would have fled anywhere to get away from this uncanny voice, but a stronger gust of wind struck his upturned face and the mysterious voice sounded even louder. He thought of the ventilator pipe, got a grip on himself, and scarcely breathed as he listened to the odd intonations of the Bahama negro speech. "Black Sam" was talking. Dan remembered the peculiar guttural cadence of his voice as he had heard it in Nassau harbor. He must have been standing directly in front of the ventilator on deck, for every word carried down the pipe to Dan:

"Ah don't care nuffin' 'bout de ship. We ain't got no tow-boats to pull her off. An' if we don't work quick an' soon them Key Westers'll be a-scatterin' down an' run us back home—you heah me? Take a big bag o' powdah an' blow de side outen her. Dat's what I say do. De cargo ports is all jammed fas'. We can't open 'em nohow. An' we ain't got no steam to hoist wid a donkey-engine. Blow de side outen her. She's hung fas' on de Reef. She ain't gwine sink. When we'se done loaded our schooners wid cargo we can strip the brasses in de engine-

room. Blow her up. Ain't I wrecked plenty vessels? Don't I know?"

Dan heard one of the other wreckers rumble:

"Sam knows bes'. Cut de fuse to burn ten minutes an' let us get back aboard our schooners. Hang de sack o' powder 'g'inst the ship's plates inside an' let her go. Reckon we'll blow a hole in her fit to run a tow-boat froo, Sam."

To Dan Frazier these last words sounded faint and confused, as if something was the matter with his hearing. He had only time to mutter "They are going to blow her up and me with her." Then he felt so giddy that he put out his arms to steady himself. His knees gave way and he sank down in a heap.

CHAPTER VII

A FAT ENGINEER TO THE RESCUE

DAN FRAZIER came to himself with the message from the ventilator pipe surging in his confused brain. The Bahama wreckers were going to blow up the ship. "A ten-minute fuse," he whispered as he began to crawl forward to escape from the hold. How long had he been unconscious? The explosion might come on the next instant. Dan was afraid to face "Black Sam" Hurley and his lawless crew, but he was far more afraid to stay below. His only thought was to gain the upper deck and jump overboard in the hope that the wreckers might pick him up. Fear gave him strength for the journey, fear such as he had never known before.

Losing his bearings in his headlong panic, Dan turned toward the side of the ship, for he had not delayed to relight his lantern. A little way in front of him a red spark glowed and

sputtered. It burned a hole in the gloom, and Dan stood stock-still and stared as if fascinated. It was the fuse of the charge of powder. He wanted to run away from it but his legs refused to carry him.

When he moved, it was not in flight but straight toward the sputtering slow-match. It was not in the least a conscious act of bravery. Dan felt sure that he could not regain the upper deck before the explosion tore him to pieces. He turned at bay to fight for his life with the instinct of a hunted animal.

Springing toward the terrible, winking spark with his fists doubled as if to ward off an attack, Dan struck at it, tore the trailing fuse free from its fastening, trampled it under his feet, and pulled it to bits after the fire was dead. The explosive itself was also an enemy which he must destroy. As if he were in a delirium, Dan whipped out his knife, cut the lashing of the sack of powder, and dragged it after him in his retreat. He came to a hatchway, let the sack drop, and heard it splash in the water which flooded the lower hold. Then he clawed his way toward daylight.

Dan no longer cared whether the wreckers saw him or not. No danger could have forced him down into the hold of the ship again. It was a place filled with horrors. When he came out into the sunshine and wind it was a kindly chance which made him lie down in a corner of the deck that was screened from sight of the wreckers' schooners. Dan had forgotten all about them. He had come to the end of his rope, and all he could think of was, "I want to go home. I want to go home."

"Black Sam" Hurley was impatiently awaiting the explosion which should tear a gap in the *Kenilworth's* side and allow his greedy wreckers to begin operations. Ten, fifteen, twenty minutes passed, and there was a great hubbub on board the Bahama schooners tossing at a safe distance from the steamer. At the end of half an hour "Black Sam" ordered a boat away and the crew crowded in pell-mell. They boarded the lee side of the *Kenilworth* with the agility of monkeys and their bare feet slapped the deck as they ran to the hatch.

Dan heard them and realized that he must try to find a resting-place where they would not dis-

cover him upon their return from below. He might perhaps be unseen if he took refuge on the bridge which the wreckers were not likely to ransack until later. He managed to drag his aching, weary body forward and laid down on the mattress behind the canvas weather screen. After a few minutes he heard the wreckers come boiling out of the hold with cries of amazement, anger, and fear. They had expected to find a faulty fuse, but fuse, powder, and all had vanished. Some of them swore the ship was haunted and refused to have anything to do with fetching another sack of powder. Their leader bellowed and threatened, but he could not quell the riot. At last he yelled that he would lay the second charge himself and stay aboard if he blew up with it. Scoffing at the idea of ghostly interference, he ordered his men to search the ship.

These plans were suddenly knocked all askew. Shouting arose on board the schooners whose crews were waving their arms toward the north. The wreckers on the steamer rushed to the side and discovered the cause of alarm. The funnel and upper works of a tug were lifting from the sea, beneath a trailing banner of smoke.

Dan had been watching the scene on deck with absorbed attention, and as he looked seaward and caught sight of the tug his heart stood still. He squinted through the glasses. There were two white bands around the funnel. Could it be the *Three Sisters* of Jacksonville, the big wrecking tug of which Captain Jim's cousin was master? The streaked smoke-stack and the stubby derrick-masts—the drab wheel-house—yes, these were things which Dan remembered noticing when the tug was in Key West. And Captain Jim must be in her. She was hurrying to find out what had become of the *Kenilworth*. "Perhaps they are looking for me," thought Dan. "And I'm still wrecking master if 'Black Sam' doesn't see me first."

The Bahama wreckers were very busy with their own affairs. The sight of the on-coming tug had altered their campaign in a twinkling. "Black Sam" was now determined to keep possession of the wreck at all hazards, acting on the theory that he was the wrecking master by the law of the Reef. He told his men to stay where they were and slid down the side of the steamer to pull off to the schooners and muster

reinforcements. A score of stalwart negroes rallied to his summons and tumbled into their boats.

A picturesque and piratical looking force they were as they scrambled over the *Kenilworth's* bulwarks and scattered along her sea-scarred decks. "Black Sam" showed his teeth in a snarl as he yelled to them:

"Dey ain't gwine be no argifying 'bout dis yere wreck. We'se heah an' we stay heah. If dem tow-boat folks tries to come aboard, keep 'em busy wid dem belaying-pins yondah an' yo' knives—yo' heah me?"

The *Three Sisters* was rapidly nearing the scene. From his ambush Dan watched her with yearning, happy eyes. He was not yet out of trouble, but Captain Jim would somehow rescue him in the nick of time. He saw the powerful tug sweep around to leeward of the Bahama schooners and slow down as if her people were trying to fathom the situation. Captain Jim Wetherly was standing by the wheelhouse door, shading his eyes with his hand. Dan wanted to call to him, but he dared not show himself. The tug crept nearer, and Dan

rejoiced to discover that most of the *Resolute's* crew were clustered along the lower deck, including the portly chief engineer, Bill McKnight, who loomed like a whale among minnows.

Presently Captain Jim sung out:

"What are you Bahama niggers doing aboard that steamer? She belongs to me. I had hold of her once and am in charge of wrecking her. Clear out before I put my men aboard."

A row of black heads bobbed in violent agitation along the *Kenilworth's* bulwarks, and "Black Sam" Hurley shouted back with a loud laugh:

"Go back home, white man. We foun' dis yere wreck 'bandoned. I'se wreckin' marster—yo' heah me? If you all wants her, come aboard an' take her."

Dan saw Bill McKnight waddle aft in great haste, dive into his room, and beckon to a *Resolute* deck-hand. Presently the two reappeared dragging a long, heavy box which the engineer began to break open with furious blows of a hatchet.

"It's the case of Mauser rifles Bill stowed away from the last filibustering cargo he ran

over to Cuba," murmured Dan. "He said he was saving 'em to start another revolution with. Hooray! hooray! there'll be something doing."

Bill McKnight was passing the rifles out to the eager crew of the *Resolute* who looked as if they were about to earn their passage aboard the *Three Sisters*. Captain Jim made one jump from the upper deck, without delaying to find the stairway, and caught up a rifle and a handful of cartridges. Once more he shouted to the wreckers on the *Kenilworth:*

"If you want trouble we'll give you plenty Are you coming off?"

"We ain't scared by dem guns," yelled "Black Sam." "You ain't got no rights in dis vessel. You all don't dare to do no shootin'."

"I've got the underwriter's agent aboard this tug, and he knows the facts," returned Captain Jim. "You are pirates and I intend to have no monkey-business. I know all about you, Sam Hurley."

"Show yo' claim on dis wreck. We'se heah. You ain't," replied the negro.

Dan could hold in no longer. He poked his head above the canvas screen of the bridge,

waved both arms over his head, and yelled at the top of his voice:

"You bet we're here, Uncle Jim. And I'm wrecking master and it is your job."

The men on the *Three Sisters* dropped their rifles and stared in silence, with mouths agape. It was a voice and a vision from the dead. "Black Sam" and his wreckers stood poised in their various threatening attitudes as if petrified. It was a strange tableau. If Dan had hopped off a passing cloud he could not have caused a more breathless sensation. The spell which his appearance cast on all who beheld him was broken by the jubilant voice of Captain Jim:

"It's Dan Frazier sure enough. Thank God you're alive and kicking, boy. Captain Bruce reported you drowned, and nobody's dared to tell your mother till I could get out to the wreck. Hold your nerve. We're coming after you."

The words awoke "Black Sam" Hurley to swift action. He was beside himself with rage at the boy on the steamer's bridge who had spoiled the explosion and then made a jest of his claims as wrecking-master. The desperate

negro had only one idea in his head—to square matters by getting his hands on Dan. He ran toward the bridge with several of his men at his heels, and Dan hastily climbed on the rail ready to jump overboard as the only way of escape. But before the wreckers had gained his refuge, he heard Captain Jim cry:

"Hold on, Dan. Don't jump. Duck and lie flat where you are."

The boy flopped full length on the bridge an instant before several rifles barked on the *Three Sisters* and bullets came singing over the *Kenilworth.* The wreckers halted, huddled in confusion, and ran for the shelter of the nearest deck-house. "Black Sam" delayed to hurl an iron belaying-pin at Dan's head and paid dearly for the act. It was Bill McKnight who drove a bullet through his arm and made him fly for cover with blood trickling from his fingers. Then the clarion tones of the fat chief engineer sounded across the water as if he had taken full command of the expedition:

"Half a dozen of you men stay here to sweep the *Kenilworth's* bulwarks with your guns and give us a chance to climb over. The rest follow

me to board her. *A la machete!* Out cutlasses. *Viva Cuba!* Hip, hip, hooroo!"

Two boats were fairly thrown into the water from the *Three Sisters* and the cheering *Resolutes* fell into them, grabbing capstan bars and coal shovels, or clubbing their rifles. The Bahama wreckers had no intention of being driven from their prize without making a fight for it. Several of them pulled revolvers from inside their shirts and popped wildly away at the approaching boats while "Black Sam" led a crowd of his followers behind the tall bulwark where they crouched, sheltered from rifle fire, and ready to receive the boarders as they came over the side. Captain Jim was in the bow of one boat, the chief engineer in the other. The wreckers had been unable to cut away the dangling boat ropes and bowlines by which they had climbed on board, and the attacking party ascended like so many acrobats. Bill McKnight was boosted and hauled part way, but as soon as he found a secure purchase for his fingers and toes, he dove over the bulwark like a landslide and pranced into action like a cyclone.

It was a pretty bit of old-fashioned board-

It was a pretty bit of old-fashioned boarding for the prosaic twentieth century

ing for the prosaic twentieth century. The *Resolutes* suffered some cracked heads and bloody faces before they gained foothold and swept forward. Try as he would, Captain Jim could not keep the terrific pace set by Bill McKnight who was swinging his rifle like a flail and clearing a wide path while he grunted maledictions at the foe.

"You're blockin' my way, you google-eyed thief. *Bing!* there's one on the cocoanut," he panted with a cheerful grin as he smote a stalwart wrecker and sent him spinning.

"We're a-coming, Dan. Keep your reserved seat," he bellowed to the bridge as he wiped the sweat from his eyes. "Black Sam's" men could not withstand the determined and disciplined onslaught and began to leap overboard, *plop! plop!* into the green sea over which the boats from their schooners were racing to pick them up. Only their leader stayed behind, sullenly nursing his wounded arm. Captain Jim halted long enough to tell him:

"My men will take you aboard the tug and patch you up from my medicine chest. Then you'd better make sail for home. The Reef

isn't healthy for your breed of Nassau wreckers. Better pass the word among your friends."

Then Captain Jim ran to the bridge, but Bill McKnight was already hugging Dan and fairly blubbering over him. The boy was too weak to struggle out of this crushing embrace, but he waggled a free hand to Captain Jim and stammered:

"W-wow, ouch. Glad to see you aboard."

"Glad to see us aboard, you rascal," laughed his uncle as he yanked the engineer away and thumped Dan on the back. "*Well*, we're tickled to death to see *you* aboard. How in the—, of all the— Whew, what are you doing here anyhow, Dan?"

His nephew made a brave attempt to answer him. Now was the time to play the hero, to tell how he had stuck to the ship and saved her. But Dan Frazier was no hero. He was just a stout-hearted lad who had weathered one cruel ordeal after another with the Almighty's aid, and he had hung on to himself as long as he could. Now there was no more call for courage. He was safe and the ship had been restored to Uncle Jim. Tears streamed down Dan's face

and he swayed against Bill McKnight who put a steadying arm around him.

"I—I'm just tired out, I—I guess," he sobbed. "Please take me home, Uncle Jim. I—I want my mother."

Bill McKnight coughed and wiped his eyes as he lifted Dan's feet clear of the deck, while Captain Jim lent his sturdy arms to the task of carrying the boy to the ship's side and lowering him into a boat. They got him aboard the *Three Sisters* without mishap, took off his tattered, grimy clothing, and tucked him in the captain's bunk.

"The boy is bruised and scratched from head to foot," said the master of the tug, Captain Jim's cousin. "We'd better sponge him down with hot water and arnica. He must have had a tougher time of it than most grown men could live through, Jim. See here, these are fresh burns on his hands. Now, where did he get those?"

"The Lord only knows," said Captain Jim as he patted Dan's flushed cheek. "Don't pester him with questions now. He's got some fever and his eyes look bad to me. I'm going

to leave McKnight on the wreck with some of my men to stand off any other kinky-headed pirates that may light on the Reef. And we're going to take this boy home to his mother as fast as you can poke this old hooker of yours into Key West."

Dan opened his eyes and smiled at Captain Jim who motioned him to be quiet. But Dan was already restless with fever and he had a hundred things to talk about if they would only stop whirling around in his head long enough to be laid hold of. He looked at his scorched fingers which were pecking at a corner of the blanket and said in a voice so weak that it sounded foolish to him:

"They tried to blow her up—to blow Jerry Pringle up—no, I don't mean that. It was 'Black Sam' Hurley—he lit the fuse, Uncle Jim —and I put it out—all alone down in the hold. You never saw such big rats—with sacks of powder tied to their tails—and eyes like sparks."

Captain Jim soothed Dan as best he could and whispered to his cousin:

"Did you get that? It's all true, I reckon. That's an old trick of the Bahama wrecking

gangs. Ask Mr. Prentice to come in. The underwriters ought to be interested in the boy."

Mr. Prentice, the Florida agent of the English marine insurance companies, was a sharp-featured, elderly gentleman of few words. He had a great deal of confidence in Captain Wetherly's ability to handle such a bad business as a costly steamer high and dry on the Reef, but he was not prepared to hear such an astonishing tale as was whispered to him in the doorway of the captain's state-room.

"Mind you, we don't know a quarter of it yet," added Captain Jim. "But it looks as if you'll have to thank Dan Frazier, not me, for saving the steamer out yonder."

"U-m-m. Bless me, but it's most extraordinary," murmured Mr. Prentice. "I must go aboard at once and look for confirmation. It's a very unusual wreck, Captain Wetherly," and the underwriter's agent shot a keen glance from under his gray brows. "I shall be much interested in getting Captain Bruce's version. Jeremiah Pringle was off here, also, the night the *Kenilworth* went ashore, was he not? I understand you were in collision with him next day."

Mr. Prentice had slightly raised his voice. It carried to Dan's ears and he raised himself on his elbow and cried out in excitement:

"We'll pull her off, Uncle Jim, and Barton won't know. And his mother won't know. Don't let them know. The captain is sorry. We can handle it all by ourselves."

"The lad is off his head, and no wonder," said Captain Jim, addressing the keen-eyed underwriter's agent. "Come outside, if you please."

"What are you holding back?" asked Mr. Prentice severely as they moved away from the door. "I intend to get to the bottom of this, you know. There is some mystery about it that is eating that lad's heart out."

"I haven't time to talk," was the reply. "But I'm going to get that ship off for you, thanks to the boy in there. And if we *are* holding anything back, it will have to stay hid and hawsers couldn't pull it out of me."

He went aft to meet Bill McKnight who had come over from the *Kenilworth* to get his orders.

"How's the boy?" anxiously asked the engineer.

"Pretty sick, I'm afraid, Bill. But home will

cure him if anything will. He's talking wild and saying too much."

Captain Jim jerked his thumb over his shoulder at Mr. Prentice and went on, "It's the mysterious ways of Providence, Bill. Captain Bruce gave the dirty business away when he was queer in his head aboard the *Resolute* at Pensacola, and Dan has put that gimlet-eyed agent on the track by going daffy here. You can peek in at the boy, and then you hustle your dunnage and pick your men and go to the *Kenilworth*. I'll be back to-morrow, and more tugs and lighters will be on the way. Take Mr. Prentice along with you. Good luck."

The engineer tiptoed into Dan's room and laid his rough hand on the pillow. He looked down in silence while his gray moustache quivered as if strong emotion was held in check. Then he lumbered on deck and prepared to quit the tug. A few minutes later the "jingle bell" rang boisterously and its clamor was borne to Dan. He smiled at Captain Jim and murmured:

"Full speed ahead! And mother will come down to the wharf when she hears our whistle off the red buoy."

CHAPTER VIII

A FOG OF SUSPICIONS

It was not until a fortnight after Dan Frazier had been taken home to Key West that he was allowed to leave his room and lounge in a wicker chair on the cottage porch. His face and hands were thinner and the sea tan could not hide the pallor caused by fever, but he looked at the glad, green world with bright eyes and clamored for food like a young cormorant. His mother, who fluttered about him with fond anxiety, had tried to banish all mention of the *Kenilworth*, but now that he was able to be outdoors he fairly bullied her with questions which had been disturbing his days and nights of illness.

"I am sure Barton is as fond of you as ever," said she. "He may have been angry at first, but he has been here to ask about you almost every day. He told me you had nothing to do with his father's tug being cut in two by brother

Jim, but he said you hooted at him when it happened. That wasn't like my Dan."

Her son tried to look repentant, but his eyes twinkled and he grinned as he replied:

"It wasn't nice of Bart to laugh at me while his cantankerous old daddy's tug was keeping the *Resolute* away from the wreck. How did Bart explain the smash-up?"

"He as much as said that Jim Wetherly behaved like a pirate and a lunatic, though of course Barton is too polite to put it in so many words," confessed Mrs. Frazier with a sigh. "It has made a lot of talk in Key West. Mr. Pringle swears he is going to take it into court. He declares he had made a contract with the captain of the *Kenilworth* when along came Jim and rammed him to get the job away from him."

"Made a contract with the *Kenilworth!* I should say Jerry Pringle did," snorted Dan with rising color. "He made his rotten contract in Pensacola, months before the ship was wrecked. He didn't get half what's coming to him. I wish Uncle Jim had sunk the *Henry Foster.* What else has happened?"

"Captain Bruce has called twice to see you.

And since meeting him I am more skeptical than ever about your conspiracy story, Dan."

"Captain Bruce been here? So you like him, too, do you?" exclaimed Dan. "Were all hands saved from the wreck?"

"They got away from the ship in their boats at daylight," answered Mrs. Frazier. "Captain Bruce had some ribs broken by being dashed against the side, and two boats were swamped. But they reached the keys with all hands and were picked up a day later by a sponger and brought down the Hawk Channel to Key West. Captain Bruce was broken-hearted over losing you, and when he heard you were still alive he insisted on leaving the hospital and coming up here, broken ribs and all. He seems very moody and depressed. I suppose he is unhappy about losing his ship."

"He is thinking about several things, I reckon," said Dan. "That ship has made everybody unhappy. She is loaded with trouble. Captain Bruce is sorry he ever clapped eyes on Jerry Pringle for one thing. And he hates himself even worse for not sticking to his vessel. And he quit her and left me on board to come

through the gale all right with the ship still under me. What is he planning to do now?"

"Wait, and take the *Kenilworth* again if she is floated," replied Mrs. Frazier. "He is going up to the Reef as soon as the doctor will let him."

She walked to the end of the porch and brushed aside the tangle of vines which partly screened her view of the street. Then she turned and said to Dan:

"Here comes Mr. Prentice and I think he intends to call here. What a very stiff and formal looking person he is!"

The underwriters' agent opened the gate with a courtly bow to Mrs. Frazier. His greetings were most polite, but he lost no time in coming to the point. Mrs. Frazier was about to withdraw, but Dan spoke up sharply:

"If it's about the *Kenilworth*, Mr. Prentice, I want my mother to stay. I keep no secrets from her."

Mr. Prentice bowed gravely and seated himself facing Dan, who could not help feeling that this elderly gentleman was unfriendly to him. The underwriters' agent opened fire without further warning:

"I am pleased to note your rapid recovery from a very trying experience, Mr. Frazier. As you may know, I represent English insurance interests which wrote a total of a hundred thousand pounds sterling on the *Kenilworth* and her cargo. If the efforts to float the vessel prove successful, the loss may be comparatively small."

Mr. Prentice adjusted his glasses, cleared his throat, and resumed with emphatic earnestness:

"You hinted at having prevented a disastrous explosion in the steamer's hold, Mr. Frazier. You may not recall the words you used. It was after you were taken on board the tug *Three Sisters*. I have made the most thorough examination of the *Kenilworth* and failed to find any traces of explosives."

"If you are going to call me a liar at the start, you won't get very far," hotly cried Dan. "Do you think I cooked up that yarn to get a reward out of the insurance companies? Did you fish in the water amidships for a sack of powder? Wait till the ship is pumped out and I'll find it for you fast enough."

Mrs. Frazier laid her hand on the lad's

"If you are going to call me a liar at the start, you won't get very far!"

shoulder, whispered in his ear, and he sank sulkily back in his chair while the unruffled Mr. Prentice asked:

"Why did you dump the powder down the hatch instead of letting it stay where it was as evidence of the dastardly attempt of the wreckers?"

"I didn't know what I was doing," exclaimed Dan in a flare of impatience. "I was scared clean out of my wits. I was afraid to turn my back on that bag of powder. Maybe you wouldn't have been as cool as an ice-chest, either, and thinking about *evidence.* What the dickens are you driving at anyhow?"

"I will drop this matter for the present," said Mr. Prentice, fishing out a small note-book as if to confirm his recollection before he declared:

"I heard you say on board the *Three Sisters,* '*Don't let them know. Keep it dark. We can handle it all by ourselves. The captain is sorry he did it.*' What did you mean, Mr. Frazier? This wreck is to be investigated. I am already convinced that certain persons on board the tug *Resolute* had advance information of the intended loss of the *Kenilworth.* Your tug had

steam up and her crew on board for several days before the disaster. Captain Wetherly started for sea in a tremendous hurry after getting a cable message that the *Kenilworth* had passed Jupiter Light. I have copies of the message he sent asking for this information and the reply from the Government signal station. Then, as if to prevent interference with a bargain made in advance, Captain Wetherly deliberately cut down and disabled the tug *Henry Foster*. I believe you know the truth. What did you mean by '*Don't let them know? Keep it dark?*'"

Dan looked bewildered for a moment and stared at Mr. Prentice who seemed to be talking the sheerest nonsense. Then, as the meaning of these suspicions filtered into the boy's mind, his face became red with wrath and astonishment. His world was turning topsy-turvy. The underwriters' agent was actually accusing Captain Jim Wetherly and the *Resolute* of the wicked deed which they had been trying to mend—of plotting to put the *Kenilworth* on the Reef! Why, this was like one of the dreams of Dan's weeks of fever. At length he pulled himself to his feet and fairly shouted:

"I know who started this crazy story of yours, Mr. Prentice. Jerry Pringle must be at the bottom of it. Do you mean to say you have listened to such infernal lies about a man like Captain Jim Wetherly? You didn't understand what I was talking about on board the *Three Sisters*. And do you think *we* had anything to do with the stranding of Captain Bruce's steamer? Do you want to know the truth? I'll tell you the truth—No, I won't. Captain Jim is my skipper and I must take my orders from him. He told me to keep my mouth shut, and I can't say anything until he gives me the word."

Mrs. Frazier was wringing her hands as she stood between Mr. Prentice and Dan, as if trying to shield her boy from harm. "Dan must not talk to you another minute," she exclaimed indignantly. "He is all of a tremble now. It is cruel of you to torment and bully him, Mr. Prentice."

The underwriters' agent apologized and tried to explain his errand in more detail.

"I like your boy, Mrs. Frazier. He is a manly fellow. I am inclined to believe that he is prompted by good motives. He is loyal to

Captain Wetherly and the *Resolute*, which is quite natural. But this *Kenilworth* affair looks like a bad business from start to finish. Something was in the wind before the steamer went ashore, and it is my duty to get at the facts without sparing any one's feelings. I want Dan to think it over and I shall have another talk with him when he feels a bit stronger."

"Why don't you tackle Captain Bruce and make him tell what he knows?" burst out Dan. "What does he say about it?"

"The case of Captain Bruce will be disposed of in London," answered Mr. Prentice; "but the evidence must be gathered in Key West."

He reluctantly took his departure and, as his tall, spare figure moved down the street, Dan followed Mrs. Frazier into the cottage and declared:

"This notion of fighting to keep disgrace and exposure away from Bart Pringle and his mother has gone about far enough. Do you suppose I am going to have you dragged into it, all because Jerry Pringle is smart enough to cover up his tracks and shift the suspicion to Uncle Jim? Not in a thousand years. Uncle

Jim will have to come to Key West and clear himself somehow."

A heavy footfall sounded on the porch and the spoon on Dan's medicine glass jingled as the ponderous presence of Bill McKnight filled the outside doorway while he raised his big voice in "Ship, ahoy? Is Dan aboard?"

"The very man I want to see. Come in," called Dan. "He won't excite me, mother, He'll be just like a hogshead of soothing syrup."

The chief engineer advanced cautiously, as if not quite certain how to handle himself in a sick-room, and whispered hoarsely:

"Keep perfectly cool and calm, my boy. We'll say nothing at all about wrecks, riots, and revolutions, will we, Mrs. Frazier? Birds and flowers and how's the weather, eh? They're the topics."

"Oh, shucks," was Dan's rude comment. "I want to know all about everything, don't I, mother? Where is the *Resolute?* What's the news from Captain Jim?"

Mr. McKnight turned to Dan's mother and waited for orders. She nodded her assent, and the visitor set himself down in a chair which

creaked and groaned. Then he extracted a package from his white duck coat and removed the paper wrapping. A glass jar was revealed which Mr. McKnight placed on the table with the explanation:

"Calf's-foot jelly, ma'am. I had to cable for it. There's a poor crop of calves in Key West. I've never been sick myself, except when I got my head busted, or broke an arm or leg, or got shot up. But we fished a box of books out of an English wreck one time, and they were mostly novels. We dried 'em out in the engine-room and all hands read 'em. And whenever anybody in them yarns took sick, I'm blessed if the vicar's wife, or the squire's daughter, or the young ladies next door, didn't trot in with this here calf's-foot jelly. They used tons of it in every novel, ma'am. I reckon it'll put Dan on his pins."

The chief engineer wiped his face and fixed a pair of spectacles on his ruddy nose, after which he gazed searchingly at Dan as if to satisfy himself that the boy was all there. Bashfully waving his paw as if to ward off Mrs. Frazier's laughing thanks, he went on to say:

"The *Resolute* is almost ready for sea and your berth is waiting for you, Dan. Captain Jim jerked the life out of her when he fetched away the towing-bitts. She was most as sad a sight as the *Henry Foster*. I've just come down from the Reef to see that the repairs are all ship-shape and run her to sea in three or four days."

"Can't I go in her, mother?" begged Dan. "I won't do any work. Tell the doctor the air will do me good. I've simply got to see the wreck. How about it, Mr. McKnight? Is she really going to come off?"

"You'd think so, if she brings a chunk of the Reef along with her," chuckled the engineer. "Captain Jim has built two coffer-dams in her, where her bottom was ripped out. He'll begin to pump 'em out next week. That will lift the bulk of the water out of her. And the wrecking pumps can handle the rest of the leaks. He's a terrible man is Captain Jim, when he gets a full head of steam in his boilers. He's patching up the bulkheads, lightering the cargo, got a force of mechanics in the engine-room, and so on till she hums like a beehive. Good weather,

Reef like a mill-pond, and two chartered tugs waiting to hook on to her, not to mention the *Resolute*."

"That beats doctors and calf's-foot jelly for putting me on my toes again," was Dan's jubilant comment. "Have you heard anything ashore here about her going on the Reef?"

Mrs. Frazier tried to head off this agitating topic, but Mr. McKnight failed to comprehend her manœuvres and briskly replied:

"No, I just come away from the Reef and hustled straight up here from looking over the *Resolute*. There's nothing leaked out, has there? I'd like to see somebody punished, you understand, but Captain Jim told me to shut up and stay shut up."

"Well, *we* are accused of putting up the *Kenilworth* job," exclaimed Dan. "Don't mind mother. She's one of us. If you're going to have a fit, please go outside. This house isn't big enough."

Mr. McKnight was too taken aback to display any violent emotion. He wiped his spectacles with great care, as if they had something to do with his hearing, and asked Dan to "say it

again, and say it slower." Dan told him all about the visit of the underwriters' agent, whereupon Mr. McKnight raised both hands and exclaimed:

"Hold on, boy. It all sounds plumb raving crazy to you, but there may be a heap more in it than you think. Who knew Jerry Pringle was aboard the *Resolute* that night in Pensacola harbor? You and me and Captain Jim, and the cook and galley boy. The rest of the crew was ashore or down below. Did you know that the cook and the galley boy quit the *Resolute* last week and went up the Gulf to ship on a Central American fruiter? They may be mighty hard to find if Jerry Pringle had anything to do with getting them out of the way. Where are our witnesses, eh? And you tell me old man Prentice has copies of the cable messages that prove Captain Jim was waiting for the *Kenilworth?* They may be mighty hard to explain."

"How about Captain Bruce?" asked Dan with a very sober face. "He is the only man that can clear it all up in a jiffy."

"I can't quite fathom him, Dan. Sometimes I think he only needs a good strong shove to

make him own up to it all and take his medicine like a man. But supposing Pringle offers him the ten thousand dollars anyhow to saddle the job on us *Resolutes*? It's worth that to Jerry to save his own skin."

"Captain Jim must get after Captain Bruce and make him tell the truth if he has to choke it out of him," cried Dan in great excitement. "As soon as we pull the *Kenilworth* off the Reef there is going to be a fight to a finish."

"You ain't quite fit for wrecking or fighting, and your mother will scold me directly for getting your bearings hot," quoth Mr. McKnight. "You just sit tight and maybe you can go up to the Reef in the *Resolute* with me."

With this the chief engineer departed under full steam, evidently afraid of facing Dan's mother. The patient suffered no relapse, however, and felt so much stronger next day that Mrs. Frazier suggested a walk as far as the parade-ground of the artillery barracks, hoping to give him a respite from any more disturbing visitors. They strolled slowly through quaint crooked streets of the sea-girt town, into the shaded plaza of the garrison which faced an

expanse of green lagoon and low mangrove-covered keys. A wharf ran out from the sea-wall in front of them and they walked idly toward it to look at the schooners beating up to the town.

Dan delayed to watch a distant sail which was scudding in from one of the near-by keys. Presently he called out:

"Don't wait for me, mother. That's the *Sombrero* yonder, and she will pass within hail of the wharf. I'm going out there and catch Bart Pringle as he scoots by."

The boys had not met since Dan's return from the Reef, and Dan was a trifle surprised that Bart had let the last three days pass without calling to see him. "I want to beg his pardon for laughing at him when the *Henry Foster* was stood on her ear," reflected Dan as he walked toward the end of the wharf. "We have a pack of things to talk about, and I must be awful careful not to say a word against his father. But there's due to be a rumpus before long."

The *Sombrero* tore past with a free sheet, fluttered into the wind, and slid gracefully up to the wharf. Dan jumped onto the bowsprit and

footed it aft with a cheery greeting to Bart who was busy with sheets and tiller.

"Hello, Dan. Glad you feel so spry. Want to run down to the fort and back?" said Bart without his usual smile. His manner was so glum, in fact, that Dan spoke up rather sharply:

"What in the world has happened to you? Has the *Sombrero* been beaten while I was laid up? My goodness, I thought you'd be glad to see me."

Bart rubbed his head, scowled at the mainsail, and sighed before he responded with an effort:

"I've got to tell you, Dan. Mind you, I don't take any stock in it, but I hate myself for letting it worry me. It's about the *Kenilworth.* It's too tough to repeat, really it is, but you ought to have a chance to come out and nail it as a lie. They say Captain Jim Wetherly knew she was going on the Reef, and that you knew it, too. I wish——"

"And you listened to such stuff?" Dan fiercely broke in. "Who told it to you?"

"Mr. Prentice asked me a lot of questions and I couldn't help seeing what he was trying to

prove, Dan. I asked my father about it and he seemed to think things looked pretty black for Captain Jim. And father is mighty seldom fooled about anything that goes on along the Reef. I want to tell him that you say it's all foolishness. He would be mighty glad to have it cleared up all right for Captain Jim Wetherly. And he knows how chummy I am with you."

"Y-you asked your f-father about it?" stuttered Dan and his eyes were blazing. "Bart Pringle, you make my head dizzy. Look here, I'll tell you one thing that's straight goods. I wouldn't believe *you* were guilty of a murder, not if they had a million witnesses, unless I saw you do it with my own two eyes. And as for the *Kenilworth*, whether Captain Bruce meant to put her on the Reef or not, Captain Jim Wetherly had nothing to do with it. And that's all I can tell you. Of course that lets me out."

Dan's heart was sore that his chum's loyalty should have been shaken in the slightest degree, but he tried to be fair, and added in a milder tone:

"Mr. Prentice got things all snarled up somehow, but it's sure to come out right. Maybe

I ought not to blame you for being worried, Bart. Things have been happening mighty fast for all hands concerned."

By this time Barton was honestly ashamed of himself and could think of nothing to say but a stammering apology which Dan accepted with a rather gloomy nod. It was the nearest their friendship had ever come to a break, and both boys would have preferred an open quarrel to this cloud of aggrieved misunderstanding. There was little more talk between them while the sloop crashed into the long seas of the outer roadstead. After they had put her about and were heading homeward, Dan exclaimed:

"There's the good old *Resolute* at her dock, and she is getting up steam. She must be 'most ready to go to the Reef. Put me alongside, Bart. I want to look her over. I'll walk home from there."

As Dan sprang up the deck of the tug he was hailed by the chief engineer. Leading the way to his state-room, Mr. McKnight picked Dan up bodily, tossed him on the bunk, locked the door, and spoke as follows:

"Things are a-popping red-hot, my boy.

Captain Jim landed from the Reef an hour ago. I told him all I knew about his being suspected of the crooked job, and what does our busy skipper do then? He promptly lays for Jerry Pringle. Does he beat him to death, same as I figured on doing sooner or later? No, Captain Jim, as usual, does what you least expect. He tells Pringle that he needs help on the *Kenilworth* wreck. Weather looks unsettled; must lighter more cargo out of her quicker than blazes; needs all the schooners he can lay his hands on, and is in a desperate hurry for another tug. Then he up and offers J. Pringle a contract to take all his vessels up to the *Kenilworth* and go along himself as assistant boss on the wreck. Jerry hems and haws, but Captain Jim looks him square in the eye and tells him to have that Tampa tug of his ready for sea at daylight tomorrow. And Jerry agrees as meek as Moses and goes off to find the skipper of his vessels."

"But why and what for?" exclaimed Dan. "Jerry Pringle working for Captain Jim on the *Kenilworth!* It's too much for me to fathom."

"For one thing, Captain Jim needs his help to get the steamer off," returned Bill McKnight.

"There isn't a smarter wrecker on the coast than this same Pringle. The love of wrecking is in his blood, and it fairly kills him to be idle with a fine, big ship on the Reef. Now that his plot to lose the *Kenilworth* is spoiled, why shouldn't he win a nice pot of money by helping save her? Then, again, maybe Captain Jim wants to heap coals on his head till he hollers for a fire-extinguisher. There is going to be something doing on the Reef, Dan. Better come along with us. You will be plenty strong enough if you have eaten up all that calf's-foot jelly I lugged up to you."

"Where does Captain Bruce come in?" asked Dan. "Will he be on the *Kenilworth*, too?"

"He goes up in the *Resolute* with us, but Jerry Pringle doesn't know it," answered Mr. McKnight with a solemn wink. "Everybody that has played a hand in this game is going to round to on the deck of that unfortunate steamer in a couple of days from now, and I'm a poor guesser if it don't turn out to be a lively reunion before she comes off the Reef."

CHAPTER IX

THE BROKEN HAWSER

THE battered *Kenilworth* lay heeled far over to one side, looming forlornly from the Reef in the midst of a smooth and sparkling sea. Her sides were gray with brine and streaked red with rust, her grimy decks strewn with a chaotic litter of cargo, timbers, and rigging. The once trim, seagoing steamer made a most distressful picture as seen from the *Resolute* which was bearing down from the direction of Key West. Captain Bruce was standing in the bows of the tug. Gazing at his helpless ship, he found it very hard to realize that he had deliberately placed the *Kenilworth* in this pitiful plight.

She looked as if she had laid her bones on the Reef for good and all, but it was plain to see that the wreckers did not think so. Cargo was tumbling from her ports into lighters strung alongside, tugs hovered fussily near-by, and groups of

active men toiled at capstans, derrick-booms, and donkey-engines.

"It looks like trying to float her before long," Captain Wetherly sung down from the wheel-house of the *Resolute*. "Come up here, Captain Bruce. I want to show you something."

The master of the *Kenilworth* mounted the ladder with an air of reluctance, for it hurt him even to talk about the ship. He looked worn and haggard and he could not rid himself of a great dread lest the *Kenilworth* might not be floated after all.

He was cheered, however, by the bouyant confidence of Captain Jim Wetherly who exclaimed with a note of mirth in his voice:

"There's a sight to make you rub your eyes, Captain Bruce. That is Jerry Pringle's tug from Tampa on the port quarter of the *Kenilworth*. And there he goes up the side. Hooray! see him chase that gang of his down the hatch. He is surely shoving the job along for all he's worth. That's his way when he once buckles down to it."

"But you were fighting each other alongside my ship not long ago. I don't understand it," commented Captain Bruce.

She looked as if she had laid her bones on the Reef for good and all

Captain Jim led the other man out of ear-shot of the wheel-house and told him with a grim smile:

"Jerry Pringle expected to work on this wreck. You know that even better than I do. I upset some plans of his, and yours. Now he has to do the job *my* way—understand? Do you know that I am suspected of plotting with you to put this ship on the Reef, Captain Bruce? You haven't heard it from Mr. Prentice? Um-m; well, you will hear a whole lot more about it from me before this ship of yours slides off into deep water."

The master of the *Kenilworth* winced at the threatening tone of these words, and his face was very red as he tried to bluster it out:

"What rot! That Prentice is a doddering old fool. Talking behind my back, is he? Of all the wicked, silly nonsense! Well, upon my word!"

"That will do for you," was Captain Jim's curt reply. "*You* are going to clear me. I kept my mouth shut to shield some innocent people, women and children, friends and kinfolk of mine—do you see? I expect to give

your ship back to you. And you are going to do the square thing by me. Think it over and think hard."

Captain Wetherly faced about and left the other gazing with a troubled frown at the *Kenilworth*. Presently Dan hailed his uncle:

"Bart Pringle came along with his father, sir. I'd like to go aboard the wreck and see him if you don't mind, sir."

"Go ahead, Dan. Last time you two lads met on that deck you bristled at each other like two terrier pups. But I don't expect to cut his dad's tow-boat in two this trip, so I reckon you'll be glad to see each other."

Dan followed Captain Bruce up the steamer's side and found Barton dangling his legs from a heap of hatch-covers.

"Why don't you get busy? I want you to know that I am the real wrecking master of this vessel," cried Dan as he thumped his friend on the back with a generous impulse to forgive and forget their recent misunderstanding. "I never saw a Pringle that was willing to loaf ten seconds on a wreck. Gracious, look at your father. You can't see him for dust."

Mr. Jeremiah Pringle was, indeed, making good his surprising contract with Captain Jim Wetherly. He viewed a difficult task of wrecking as a personal battle between the Reef and himself; his brains, brawn, and courage matched against the perils of the sea. While the boys watched him drive his crew of hardy wreckers, Bart remarked:

"I thought father and Captain Jim were red-hot at each other over the *Henry Foster* business, didn't you? They must have patched it up all right, and that's enough to show how silly those stories were about—about the wreck and Captain Jim. Father wouldn't lend a hand in a crooked job for any money. I have been feeling meaner than a yellow pup for ever bothering my head about those rumors that lugged you into the dirty work, Dan. Will you really forgive me?"

"I was mean and nasty to you when the *Henry Foster* was split wide open, so I reckon we are quits," confessed Dan. "Let's shake hands and forget it."

"I'd trust you as I would trust my own father," earnestly exclaimed Bart. "Right down

in my heart I would no more dream of your being mixed up with a crooked wrecking job than I would think of suspecting him. That's as strong as I can put it. You won't hold it out against me any more, will you, honest?"

Jeremiah Pringle had come out of a forward hold and was making his way aft along the ship's side to release a fouled guy-rope. The boys did not see him pass behind them, and as Bart waxed earnest his voice carried to his father's ears. The stern-visaged wrecker halted and listened with the most intense interest. He heard his own son say:

"I'd trust you as I'd trust my own father. . . . That's as strong as I can put it."

Jeremiah Pringle had been dealt a blow from a quarter so unexpected that he was quite staggered. Moving stealthily out of sight of the two lads, he went about his duty but his mind was painfully active with emotions which were as novel as they were disturbing.

It had never before occurred to him that his boy's life was anywhere linked with his own. He did not intend to set him a bad example, nor bring disgrace on the name he bore. But now

Barton had accused and condemned him, not by doubting but by believing in him. It was brought home to him from a clear sky that his son was shaping his own course by what he believed his father to be. As Jeremiah Pringle sweated through the long day, he sullenly reflected:

"I can't argue it out with the fool boy. And what get's under my skin, too, is the way Dan Frazier has handled himself since that night in Pensacola. He must have got wind of the *Kenilworth* job then. I hate to be under obligations to anybody, and Jim Wetherly and that boy have been keeping it all back from my boy. Why? So Barton wouldn't be ashamed of his daddy. That's a cheerful notion to take to bed with me."

He had begun to feel that it might be unfair to his son's faith in him to engage in any more shady wrecking operations, and he was nearer being ashamed of himself than he had been in many years. It seemed as if Captain Jim Wetherly read his thoughts, for he halted him next day long enough to say:

"You have taken hold in great shape. It

helps square matters, Jerry. It is your duty to get this ship off the Reef; you know that. And you will never be able to look that boy of yours in the eye until the *Kenilworth* is towed into port and made ready for sea again."

Mr. Pringle was in no mood to have his sins or his duty flung in his teeth, and he retorted savagely:

"Don't preach at me, Jim Wetherly. I break even with you by helping you get this vessel afloat. And I won't make you pay for smashing the *Henry Foster*. That squares all debts between us."

Meanwhile Dan and Barton had explored the *Kenilworth* from end to end, Dan telling at great length the story of his imprisonment among the cargo in the hold. When he came to the chapter dealing with the visit of the Bahama wreckers, he hurried Bart to the spot where he had found the lighted fuse and sack of powder. Alas, even the fragments of the fuse had been swept away in the task of lightering the cargo. Dan headed for the nearest hatchway to search for the powder. The compartment into which he had thrown it was cleared of water, the

débris shovelled out, and the shattered bottom plates covered deep with cement and timber bracing.

"Our wreckers didn't find the powder bag, or Captain Jim would have told me," mourned Dan. "The canvas may have ripped open or rotted where it fell. You believe it all, don't you, Bart? But that hatchet-faced old Prentice as much as called me a liar. And I won't be happy till I can make him take it back. He thinks I was trying to pull his leg with the explosion yarn. Why, I couldn't have made up a story like that in a thousand years."

"Don't you care. Of course it's true. And it was splendid. I am certainly proud of you," declared Bart who was anxious to make amends for the rift in their friendship. "You and I will back old Prentice into a corner first chance we get and make him apologize—won't we?"

The underwriters' agent came on board two days later and had a long interview with Captain Jim behind the locked door of the chart-room, after which Captain Bruce and Jeremiah Pringle were singly summoned for more mys-

terious conferences. But no attention was paid to Dan who felt that he moved in a cloud of suspicion and dismally reflected:

"Old Prentice has set me down as a liar and won't even give me a chance to deny it. I wish I could have kept that fuse to hitch to his coat-tails. I won't save another ship for him,—that's one thing sure."

At length the day came when Captain Jim Wetherly announced that he intended pulling on the stranded steamer with all four tugs at high water in the afternoon. They might not be able to start her, but it was worth trying, for the spell of fair weather could not be expected to last much longer. Dan was still grumbling to himself as he went off to the *Resolute* which had signalled for all hands to return.

One by one the tugs got into position for a "long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together." Captain Wetherly stayed in the *Kenilworth* to direct operations and took his station up in the bows. To Jerry Pringle was entrusted the important duty of properly making fast the hawsers from the tugs. It amused Captain Jim to hear him fiercely shouting orders to the crew of

the *Resolute* who glared at their former foeman as if they would like to muster a boarding party and attack him.

The men in the yawls and on the rolling decks of the tugs worked with more caution than usual. They did not mind falling overboard or being upset by an obstreperous hawser as part of the day's work. But the dumping overboard of damaged cargo, including smashed cases of salt meats and other provisions, had lured scores of huge sharks which hovered in the clear, green depths at the edge of the Reef or rushed to the surface at the splash of box or barrel. All hands breathed easier when the hawsers had been passed aboard without mishap.

When all was in readiness to begin the tug-of-war between the tow-boats and the Reef, Captain Wetherly's nerves were tingling with excitement. The hour had come to put his faith and his works to the crucial test. It meant more to him than salvage, for he was also seeking with might and main to undo a wrong of which this ship had been the victim.

"The old *Resolute* will pull her heart out before she quits," he muttered. "I've given her

the hardest berth, for she knows we can't afford to lose this ship."

Slowly the tugs forged ahead until they were straining at their hawsers like a team of well-handled horses, each using every bit of its strength to the best advantage. Then it was "full speed ahead," and they buckled down to their task as if no odds were great enough to daunt them,—*Resolute*, *Three Sisters*, *Fearless*, and *Hercules*. Soon the rusty, high-sided *Kenilworth* was veiled in the black clouds of smoke which drifted from their belching funnels. Captain Jim moved to leeward to get a clearer view and observed that Jeremiah Pringle was standing within a few feet of the vibrating steel hawser of the *Resolute*, where it led in over the bows of the *Kenilworth*.

"That is a brand-new line, but it isn't healthy to get so near it," he called out. "That tow-boat of mine has busted them before this, Jerry."

"Always bragging of those engines of yours. You are as bad as Bill McKnight," Pringle shouted back.

He looked down at the ponderous steel cable

with a careless laugh. A moment later Captain Jim forgot his own warning and ran to the side to shout an urgent order to one of the tugs. He stood for a few seconds almost on top of the hawser where it led inboard and was about to retreat to his former station when the huge line twanged with a rasping note as if its fibres were overstrained. He wasted a precious instant in looking down to find out what the trouble might be, heard the steel cable crack and give, tried to flee, and caught his toe in a ring-bolt screwed to the deck.

Just then Jerry Pringle lunged forward and knocked Captain Jim flat with a sweep of his powerful right arm. This deed, done with lightning speed and rare presence of mind, sufficed to put Captain Jim out of harm's way, but it used the precious second of time in which Jeremiah Pringle might have saved himself.

Before Pringle could drop on deck or leap for shelter, the hawser snapped in twain with a report like that of a cannon. The ragged ends whizzed through the air with the speed and destructiveness of projectiles. One of them crashed against a metal stanchion, cut it clean

in two, and knocked a pile of timber braces in all directions. These obstacles saved Jerry Pringle from being sliced in twain, but he was swept up in the flying debris and sent spinning overboard as if he were a chip caught in a tornado.

The accident happened with such incredible swiftness that Captain Wetherly scrambled to his feet and stood blinking at the spot from which Pringle had vanished as if he were blotted out of existence. Then, pulling himself together, with a yell of horrified dismay he rushed to the side of the ship and stared down into the sea which was seething with the foamy wash from the screws of the nearest tugs. He saw a black object rise to the surface, drift toward the stern, and then slowly sink from sight. Running aft where the water was clear, he caught a glimpse of the body of Jerry Pringle settling toward the white coral bottom.

Two of the tugs were hastily manning boats. Captain Jim glanced toward them and knew their help would come too late. He thought of the sharks which had been flocking around the ship. They could not have been driven very

far away by the tumult of the tugs. While he wavered, Captain Jim said to himself:

"He didn't figure on the odds when he bowled me out of danger before he tried to save himself. Here goes."

Springing upon the bulwark, he jumped clear and sped downward with feet together and arms stretched above his head. It was a thirty-foot drop to the water and he shot into it as straight and true as a dipsey lead. His impetus carried him far down into the cool, green sea and, opening his eyes, he dimly discerned the shadowy form of the man he sought drifting above him. As Captain Jim rose he grasped the other by the shirt and struck out with his free arm. Pringle might be dead for all he knew, but he hung to him like a bull-dog, fighting his way upward to reach the blessed air and ease his tortured lungs

A boat was pulling madly toward the scene, the crew yelling and splashing to hold the sharks at bay. Most clamorous of the party was the chief engineer of the *Resolute* who was roaring with tears in his eyes:

"Wow—wow—wow, keep a yellin', boys. It's

Captain Jim they're after. Jerry Pringle's too tough for 'em."

A black fin skittered past the boat and Bill McKnight blazed away at it with a rifle which he had caught up on the run. A few more desperate strokes and they slackened speed and beat the water into foam with the flat of their oars. A long, sinister shadow slid swiftly under the boat and the men yelled as they saw it veer toward the stern of the Kenilworth. But this hastening shark had overrun its prey. Captain Jim and his burden rose within an oar's length of the yawl and were grasped by a dozen eager hands before they could be attacked.

Dan Frazier was not in the boat. He had not recovered his wits until his comrades had shoved clear of the *Resolute*. He stood as if paralyzed and watched the rescue. When the two dripping figures were hauled into the yawl and he saw Captain Jim sit up and shake himself like a retriever, a wordless prayer of thanksgiving welled from the depths of his heart.

Then he saw the boat move toward Jerry Pringle's tug which lay on the other side of the *Kenilworth*, screened from view of the rescue.

Bart had gone on board this tug earlier in the day, and Dan felt his knees tremble as he saw the body of Jeremiah Pringle hoisted over the low bulwark. It seemed an age before the yawl returned to the *Resolute* and Captain Jim leaped on deck, followed by the chief engineer. Their faces were very solemn and they spoke with evident effort:

"Were—were you too late, Uncle Jim?" stammered Dan.

"Yes, he must have been dead when he struck the water," slowly returned Captain Wetherly. "But I'm glad I went after him. He made a brave man's finish. It's awful tough on Bart, but he is standing up under it like a thoroughbred. Jerry Pringle staked his life and lost it for me."

Captain Jim wiped his eyes and coughed. Bill McKnight ventured to say to Dan:

"He'd have done the same trick to save one of his own deck-hands. Jerry Pringle was a brave and ready man, we all know that. It was instinct. He didn't have time to figure it out. But I reckon God Almighty will give him plenty of credit and square accounts for what-

ever he did wrong. Whew! I can't realize it a little bit."

"The tug will take him down to Key West right away," said Captain Jim. "I'm going along with Jerry Pringle on his last voyage. Want to come, Dan? It will do Bart a whole lot of good to have you as a shipmate and you can tell him that his father was a man to be proud of. We'll forget everything that happened before to-day. You come aboard the *Kenilworth* with me and I'll leave orders for my men. I'll have to be back here to-morrow if this steamer is to come off the Reef. I have a notion that Jerry Pringle was sorry he ever helped to put her on there. And from watching him lately I believe we couldn't please him any better than by getting the *Kenilworth* off and mending the wrong he planned to do."

As they boarded the *Kenilworth* Captain Bruce met them and asked in a voice hoarse with emotion:

"They tell me he has slipped his cable. If my ship had not stranded it would not have happened."

"What are you going to do about it? Let *me*

be accused of helping to wreck your steamer?" sternly replied Captain Wetherly. "Jeremiah Pringle has squared his accounts and made *his* record clean. But how about you?"

CHAPTER X

DAN'S DREAMS COME TRUE

THE first pull on the stranded steamer had been halted by the tragedy of Jeremiah Pringle's heroic death. As soon as possible Captain Jim Wetherly hastened back from Key West to the Reef and Dan rejoined his shipmates in the *Resolute*. They were very loth to leave the widow and the son of the wrecking-master who, with all his faults, had died as he had lived, unflinching in the face of the perils of the sea. But Duty sounded a trumpet-call to save the *Kenilworth*, and with flags at half-mast the tireless tugs again hovered about her under the vigilant direction of Captain Wetherly.

Meanwhile the wreckers had been toiling in night and day shifts, taking out more cargo. When at length the tugs were summoned for another titanic tussle, every man felt that the supreme moment was at hand. It was now or

never. Captain Wetherly voiced the feelings of all with passionate energy:

"She has *got* to go. That's all there is to it."

The tugs had been pulling a scant hour when Captain Jim felt the keel of the *Kenilworth* grind on the coral bottom. It was no more than a slight shock which made the ship tremble as if she felt a thrill of returning life and freedom. Then she hung fast for a long time, moved again, and perceptibly righted herself. Another interval of futile effort, and at last the steamer slid forward with a dull, harsh roar as her broken keel ripped through the coral and ploughed slowly down the sloping shelf into the deep water on the landward side of the Reef.

The frantic tugs behaved as if they could not believe the *Kenilworth* was actually afloat. They refused to stop pulling with might and main until their prize was trailing after them down the fairway of the Hawk Channel. Their whistles bellowed jubilation while Captain Jim signalled the *Resolute*:

"Keep her going for Key West."

The panting tugs led the sluggish, battered steamer out through the nearest gap in the Reef,

and she rolled solemnly in the swells of the open sea where she belonged. Captain Bruce was pacing the bridge of his ship, nervous, absorbed in his own thoughts, and oblivious of the general rejoicing. Above the stern of the *Kenilworth* the British ensign still flew at half-mast and served to recall a tragedy which Captain Bruce wanted to forget. His partnership with Jerry Pringle had been ill-fated from the start. In a flash of splendid manliness Pringle had given his life to save the man who had smashed the evil partnership. And was he, Malcolm Bruce, ship-master, willing to let this Jim Wetherly stand accused of the crime planned in Pensacola harbor? No, he had not come to such depths of degradation as this. He had fought it out with himself and he was ready to take the consequences. Dan Frazier came on board the *Kenilworth* for orders when the tugs slackened way to shift their hawsers, and Captain Bruce beckoned him to a corner of the bridge where Captain Wetherly was standing. The haggard ship-master placed his hand on the lad's shoulder as he began to speak:

"I want Dan to hear what I have to say, Cap-

tain Wetherly. He came aboard my ship when she went on the Reef and refused to believe the worst of me, though he knew it all the time. I abandoned the ship and left him on board instead of sticking by her as I honestly intended to do. But I see now that my will had been undermined. There was a rotten spot in my heart."

"You didn't mean to abandon me, sir," spoke up Dan. "I never held that against you."

"I am glad you have a decent word for me," replied Captain Bruce with the shadow of a smile. "The long and short of it is that I am going to make a clean breast of it to the underwriters' agent, Mr. Prentice, when we get to Key West. It seems to be the only way to clear you, Captain Wetherly. Of course I never dreamed that circumstances could be twisted about to fetch you into this miserable business. But Pringle has gone, and I am not quite enough of a cur to dodge my share of the punishment. I make no defence, but my record was fairly clean until—well, you know when. My owners are shrewd, tricky, close-fisted men who got me into their way of doing business a little at a time. My ideas of right and wrong were warped by

degrees. Men don't go bad all at once, Dan. Don't ever forget that. A ship's timbers don't rot overnight and let her founder in the gale that tests her strength. The first speck of rot is almost too small to see, but it grows. At last these people had me fit for their work, and three voyages ago they put it at me that there would be no great sorrow if the *Kenilworth* met disaster. I should have quit them on the spot, but I took the temptation to sea with me. And in the next voyage I ran afoul of Jeremiah Pringle in Pensacola. He found me willing to listen. Five years ago I would have kicked him out of my cabin. You know the rest of it. Ten thousand dollars was the price if he could have the vessel to wreck. And my owners were ready to give me a bigger, newer ship if I lost her for the insurance. But you spoiled all that, and I am glad you did. I seem to have been a weak-kneed kind of a rascal."

"Bully for you," cried Captain Jim. "Shake hands on it. Dan here was sure you were sorry you ever got into this mess, the first time he met you. But this is mighty serious business for you, Captain Bruce. The underwriters will

make an example of you, as sure as guns. Are you going back to England to face the music?"

"It means that I am in disgrace and will command no more ships, I suppose," was the reply. "And I suppose it means a dose of prison, but I don't mean to veer from the course I have charted. There isn't any other way out of it. I would rather be dead along with Jerry Pringle than to go on hating myself and living in a hell of my own making."

"I reckon you are right," said Captain Jim after a long silence. "It pays to go straight, and every man must work out his own salvation."

"Anyhow, you would feel a heap worse if your ship had gone to pieces," Dan ventured to suggest in his effort to find a ray of sunshine in the cloud.

"Right you are, my lad. It has been a great fight, and a man couldn't work alongside this uncle of yours very long without wanting to live straight and clean. You helped save the *Kenilworth*, Dan. I haven't forgotten that."

"But you can't square me with old man Prentice," sadly returned Dan. "I think it's great of

you to stand by Captain Jim, but it doesn't help my case. I am still left high and dry as a liar."

"Things will straighten themselves out now. Don't worry," smiled Captain Bruce. "Mr. Prentice will be easier to handle after he knows the facts in my case."

"How about salvage? Don't I come in on that?" anxiously asked Dan who was not old enough to appreciate the sacrifice involved in Captain Bruce's confession.

"I expect to be paid my towing and wrecking bill to cover my time and expenses," said Captain Jim. "But I don't want any more salvage than that. I won't take blood-money, not even from the pockets of those scoundrelly owners of yours, Captain Bruce. They won't be able to collect a cent of insurance after you make your statement, and the repairs will cost them a small fortune. The underwriters will make it hot enough for them. Trust Prentice for that."

Dan raised his voice in most lugubrious accents:

"But won't there be any salvage for me after all I went through in this beastly ship? Why, I have been expecting to get rich from it, to go

North to school and college with Bart, and buy a bigger yacht, and give mother a spree in New York and—and all I get is to be called a liar by old man Prentice."

Dan's disappointment was so keen that Captain Jim hastened to console him. "I kind of overlooked your case. Sure enough, I've robbed you of your rights, haven't I? I suppose if you could go North to school, you and your mother would feel that you had your share of salvage, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, indeed. That would clear up the account in great shape," cried Dan. "But where is the money coming from? You can't charge it up against the *Kenilworth's* owners, can you?"

"Well, if those Bahama niggers had blown up the steamer, the owners' bills might be a good deal bigger," smiled his uncle. "Just let your salvage claim rest for a day or so. I promise you it will be worked out somehow."

Early in the morning the *Kenilworth* moved slowly to an anchorage in the inner harbor of Key West, at last in a friendly haven. Her escort of victorious tugs whistled a glad alarm as they cast loose and steamed toward their sev-

eral wharves. Dan was on board the *Resolute*, and as she neared the shore he saw his mother hastening down to the landing place.

"You will be all the salvage she wants out of this job," said Captain Jim as Dan waved his cap for an answering signal to the fluttering handkerchief. A little later mother and son walked homeward together and she learned of Captain Bruce's manly decision to make atonement. Her tender heart was moved with pity for his plight and she spoke up impulsively:

"I knew there was a great deal of good in him, Dan. And think how forlorn and unhappy he must feel. He needs friends. Ask him up to see us. I am very sorry for him."

"All right, mother. He has shown himself to be a pretty good sort of a man, after all. How is Bart Pringle? Is he all broken up? He's been on my mind most of the time since I went back to the Reef."

"It was a dreadful shock to Mary Pringle and her boy," replied Mrs. Frazier. "But they will be happy again after a while. Jerry Pringle was a hard man, Dan, and he never really knew his own family. He was the richest man in Key

West and of course they have no worries about money. They fairly worship his memory because he died a hero's death. But it is as if they were admiring some noble character in a book, not a real, live man who was a part of their daily lives. They never knew him well."

"Perhaps it was all for the best," sighed Dan. "Bart will never know anything else about his father and he has a memory to live up to that is a better inheritance than all the money that was left behind. Oh, but it was worth while fighting hard to keep the truth from Bart and his mother."

In the afternoon Dan went back to the *Resolute* to invite the chief engineer to supper. Mr. McKnight announced as he staggered the boy with an affectionate blow between the shoulders:

"Old Prentice was aboard looking for you not an hour ago, and said he'd come back if he didn't find you at home. I told him that if he had a notion of calling you a liar some more, I was your proxy and he could say it to me. I began to roll up my sleeves and he plumb near backed himself overboard."

"I wish he had," returned Dan. "What on earth does he want now? The *Kenilworth* affair is all cleared up."

"Well, he was dying to see you, Dan. Better wait aboard. The old icicle will wander back after a while. I hear we are going to tow the *Kenilworth* to Jacksonville to be docked for repairs. Do you know when?"

"Captain Jim said in about a month," replied Dan. "As soon as she can be patched up to stand the voyage. But maybe I won't be with you, then. It depends on whether I win my salvage case."

"Too much sun. Gone a bit queer in the head," murmured Mr. McKnight. "We surrendered all claim to salvage—you know that. It's an outrage, too. When I was wreckin' on the coast of— Hello, here comes old Prentice now."

The underwriters' agent was advancing with almost undignified haste, and as he came down the gang-plank he extended his hand to Dan and exclaimed in most friendly fashion:

"Delighted to find you, Mr. Frazier. You will be good enough to sit down aft with me for

a few minutes? I wish to show you a document which has just reached me."

Brushing past the glowering chief engineer, Mr. Prentice fumbled in his breast pocket and brought forth a large, official-looking envelope. His manner was really sheepish as he hemmed and hawed, flourished the envelope, and said:

"I wish to offer you an apology, Dan, which you are manly enough to accept, I am sure. I find myself in—er—a rather painful position. The fact of the matter is that I have been guilty of an error of judgment. I have in my hands a letter sent to me in care of the British consul in Key West. Attached to it is an affidavit which you may examine at your leisure. To make a long story short, these documents come from Nassau. While investigating the *Kenilworth* disaster, it occurred to me to make some inquiries concerning one Hurley, known as "Black Sam," who had possession of the steamer when you were rescued from her. Your story of preventing an explosion seemed improbable to me, partly because I could find no proof, and also because I held certain other suspicions, now re-

moved, I am glad to say. I made an effort to locate this Hurley person. There was not one chance in a thousand that he would confirm the truth of your story, if found. But,by extraordinary good luck, he was recently arrested for cracking the skull of one of his crew. And while in jail he was visited by my agent in Nassau. You will be surprised to learn that he readily consented to sign an affidavit describing his attempt to blow up the *Kenilworth*, and your part in the episode. The fellow has a rude sense of humor, it appears, and had come to regard it as a good deal of a joke on him."

"It is great news for me," exclaimed Dan. "I hated to have you think what you did."

"I have something more to say," resumed Mr. Prentice with a smile. "Captain Bruce and Captain Wetherly came to see me to-day. It was a strange interview, as you may perhaps guess. Captain Bruce confessed that he had tried to lose his ship on the Reef. My suspicions were wrong from start to finish, and I have apologized to Captain Wetherly. In fact, I seem to be a walking apology. But the chapter is closed. The steamer is to be made fit for sea by

her owners, without a penny of cost to the underwriters, and her master will go to England to face the consequences of his confession. The owners will also have to settle for damages to cargo. Under the circumstances, I am of the opinion that the underwriters are deeply indebted to you for preventing the total loss of the *Kenilworth*. They can well afford to do the handsome thing by you, my boy, not as salvage, but as a gift, a reward for a heroic deed. Such gifts have been bestowed on several ship-masters within my recollection. Captain Wetherly informs me that you are ambitious to get an education. I pledge you my personal word that you can count upon receiving a sum of several thousand dollars to assist that praiseworthy ambition. I expect to go to England shortly, and will look after the matter myself."

While Dan struggled between gratitude and amazement to find words to fit the occasion, Mr. Prentice patted his shoulder with fatherly affection and added:

"I know the story of your loyalty to your friend, young Barton Pringle. It seems right and proper that you should go away to school

together, without a shadow between you any longer."

Mr. Prentice left the Nassau documents with Dan and took his departure, leaving the lad to stammer the wonderful tale to Bill McKnight who found an outlet for his own emotion by announcing:

"I'm going to hustle right ashore, Dan, and hire the Key West brass band to serenade old Prentice to-night. I've got money in the bank, boy, and I'm going to turn it loose."

While this rash declaration was being argued, Captain Wetherly came aboard and added his congratulations to the tumultuous celebration. When Mr. McKnight became quieter for lack of breath, Dan spoke up with a sudden shock of unhappy recollection:

"But how about Captain Bruce, Uncle Jim? It doesn't seem fair for him to be left all alone to go back to England and be in disgrace among his own people. Why, if he stands by his guns, he will be sent to prison."

"I had a long talk with him an hour ago," replied Captain Wetherly. "He can't be budged from his resolution to take all the blame for the

disaster. And of course his owners will try to shift it all onto him and they may be able to clear themselves in court. I can't help admiring his pluck. But he may come back here later, Dan. I have just landed a big Government contract for towing and dredging work, to last for several years. And I need more help with the business I have now. I asked Captain Bruce to come back to Key West when he gets clear of his troubles in England. I told him that he would be with friends here, with folks who believed in him. I would trust him as a partner. He will never go wrong again."

"What did he say?" asked Dan and Bill McKnight in the same breath.

"He was considerably touched. Said he would think it over, and thanked me, and went off to tell Prentice about it. He will come back to work with me some day, I am pretty sure."

A few weeks later Dan Frazier and Barton Pringle were waving their farewells to Key West from the deck of a mail steamer, northward bound to enter a preparatory school. Their mothers were standing together on the wharf

and behind them towered the rugged figure of Captain Jim Wetherly. As the steamer drew away and the last "good-byes" were shouted across the water, Bart sighed and murmured to his friend:

"Father ought to be there to see me off. I can't realize it yet, Dan. But I must try to live up to the example he set for me. I am so glad he and Captain Jim became good friends. It was the *Kenilworth* that brought them together. I reckon they were the same breed of men, only it took them a long time to find it out."

Dan looked across the harbor at the rusty *Kenilworth* which was almost ready to be towed away to a dry-dock. The sight of her thrilled him with memories of the hardships, dangers, and tragedy of the weeks of hard-fought battle on the Reef. It came over him that while he had won his salvage and his fondest dreams were coming true, perhaps Barton Pringle had won even richer and more enduring salvage in the bright memory of his father's last deed, a memory and an inspiration unmarred by the knowledge of anything less worthy.

"I am proud of Uncle Jim," said Dan at

length. "And you can always be proud of your father, Bart."

Presently the steamer passed the *Resolute* which lay at her wharf ready for sea. The chief engineer hurried into the wheel-house and pulled the whistle cord for all he was worth. The tug roared a hoarse farewell, and Dan gazed at her and the burly figure of Bill McKnight with glad affection in his eyes. They stood for something worth while to the boy who was leaving his shipmates to venture into strange waters and chart a new career. He had toiled among men who were fitly called "the Resolutes," and the lessons of duty he had learned afloat would not be soon forgotten ashore. Dan was thinking aloud as he said while he waved his cap at the powerful, seagoing tug in which he had played his part as a humble deck-hand:

"I don't know what this preparatory school up north is going to be like, but I reckon if I can play the game so the *Resolute* won't be ashamed of me I'll come out all right."

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